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THE MAGAZINE OF

# Fantasy AND Science Fiction

MERCURY PUBLICATION

NOVEMBER 40¢

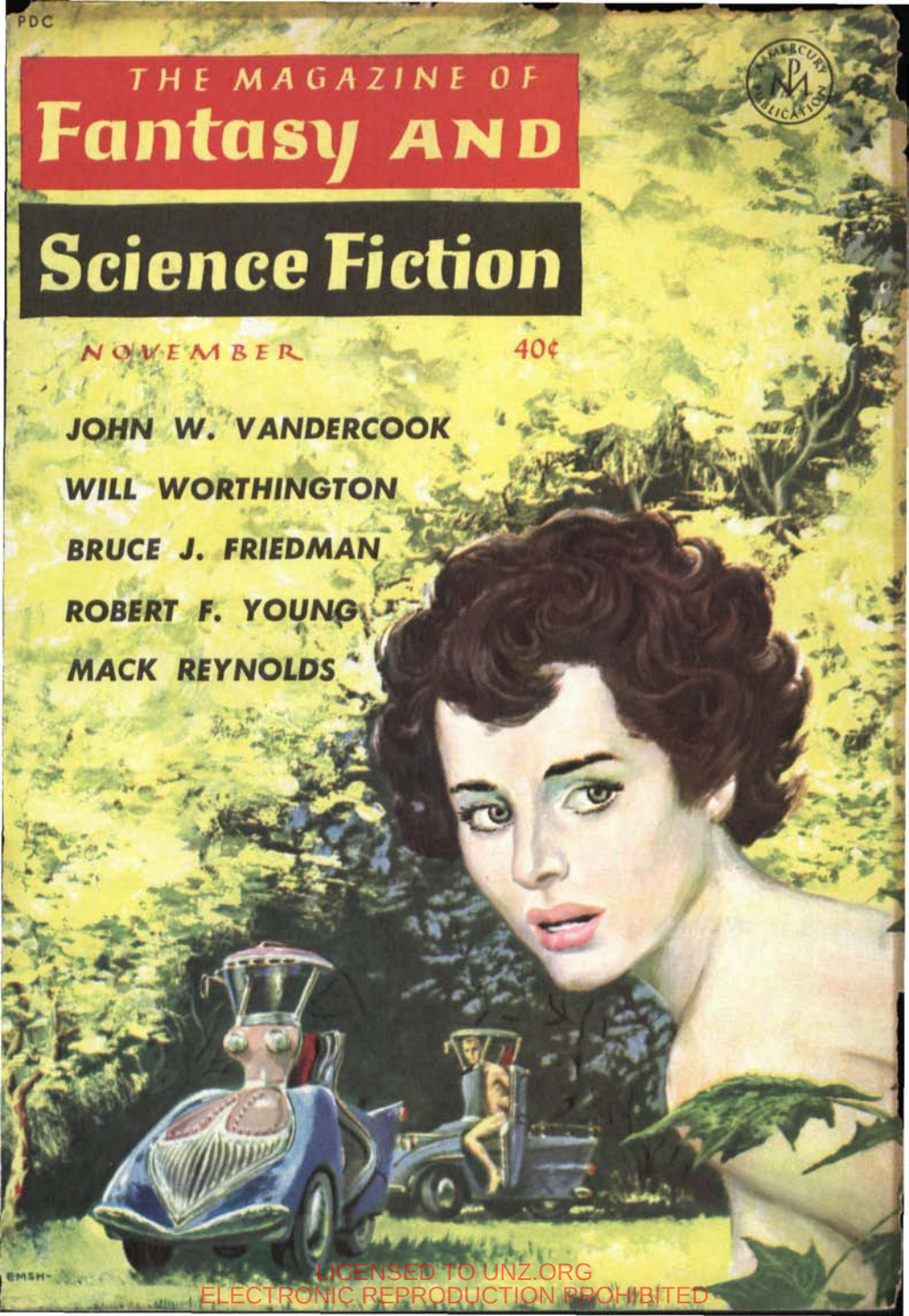
JOHN W. VANDERCOOK

WILL WORTHINGTON

BRUCE J. FRIEDMAN

ROBERT F. YOUNG

MACK REYNOLDS



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# Fantasy and Science Fiction

NOVEMBER *Including Venture Science Fiction*



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*Cover by Emsh*
*(Illustrating "Romance in a Twenty-First Century Used-Car Lot)*



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## *In this issue . . .*

A memorandum just received from The Good Doctor Asimov:

"In my article, THE TOOLS OF THE TRADE (F&SF, September, 1960), I made two misstatements regarding algebraic numbers, as several Gentle Readers pointed out very Gently. I spoke of algebraic numbers as being those which could serve as values of $x$ in the general polynomial equation. That is correct, so far.

"However, I also said that any algebraic number could be derived from the coefficients of the equation by a definite number of algebraic operations, and that is not quite correct. This holds only for equations up to and including the fourth degree.

"In the second place, I went on to say that given a line segment of unit length, another segment representing any algebraic number could be constructed by straight-edge and compass alone. There I was even more over-optimistic. In general, only algebraic numbers satisfying equations of the first and second degree can be so constructed.

"For instance, a line segment equal to the cube root of two (a value representing a solution to an equation of the third degree) cannot be constructed by compass and straight-edge alone despite the fact that it is an algebraic number. If it could be so constructed, the Greeks would have been able to solve two classical unsolved (and insoluble) problems; the duplication of the cube (that is, given a cube, to construct another cube of exactly twice the volume of the first) and the trisection of the angle (that is, given any angle, to divide it into three equal angles) by straight edge and compass alone.

"Fortunately, however, the main thesis of the article concerning pi and the transcendental numbers remains generally correct despite the modifications of the argument above. For that, I am thankful."

## *Coming soon . . .*

Next month: "Rogue Moon," an exciting, different, short novel by Algis Budrys; in following issues: "Time Lag," a novelet by Poul Anderson . . . "Saturn Rising," by Arthur C. Clarke . . . "Shotgun Cure," by Clifford D. Simak. And Alfred Bester reports that his promised two-part novel will be along very soon.

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*Shortly after he turned seventeen—a few months ago—Vance Aandahl sold his first story, to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Later that same week, he sold his second story—the following admirably economical rendering of the attitudes of youth and age, and the rhythm of the universe. You will surely be seeing more of Vance Aandahl's work, here and elsewhere—he is, we believe, a born writer.*

# IT'S A GREAT BIG WONDERFUL UNIVERSE

*by Vance Aandahl*

"SEVEN-CARD STUD," SAYS Threefingers. "It's a double-action game."

"Wow!" say I. "Seven-card stud!"

"Deal," says Silver, giggling to himself and stroking the mauve fur on his left ear.

Cards drift gently to the table: two down and one up; Silver is high with an ace, but look out for my hidden kings! Two minutes later: I've got seventy credits in my pocket, I'm as free as a deep spacer (once was, remember that), and I'm dancing down the neon-lit streets of New Denver. Snockered too—Threefingers is gay with his juice, so to speak, and I've sneaked a little through there. Seventy credits and snockered too! It's a great big wonderful universe!

What's this? I'm still dancing, but the neon lights have disappeared and I can almost see the sky. Now I know: it's TVtown and here come the addicts, jumping up and down. Who's that? The big man with the little flute—he's singing a song:

"Dancing on the sidewalk
At the close of day,
Seven hundred madmen—
White and black and gray—
Spoke to me in whispers,
Hushed and monotone;
Spoke to me of dangers,
Terrible, unknown!"

The big man turns around now, and the others whisper at him:



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"Television got us! Television got us!
Beware the Television!
He'll get you!
He'll get you . . ."

Then the big man sings again:

"Bleeding from their eyeballs
At the close of day,
Seven hundred madmen—
White and black and gray—
Screamed at me with howls,
Hideous and shrill,
Screamed at me of dangers
Nameless, nameless still!"

Taking flute to mouth, the big man faces his followers; they howl at him:

"Television got us! Television got us!
Beware the Television!
He'll get you!
He'll get you . . ."

Having had enough, I depart in time-warp style. I land on Hog Street, and immediately decided to spend my seventy credits on Miss Plastic Wonders, a little android number that strolls up and confirms my joyous outlook on life. Wow! Fifty/twenty/thirty-five, and the best materials in the trade! At this crucial moment, guess who shows up?

Grandfather Adler!

Grandfather Adler—he's in New Denver! I forget about Miss Plastic Wonders and her portable wares. Now I chase Grandfather Adler into a little place that caters to deep spacers.

First, a word of warning: if you've never seen a deep spacer, you've never seen Grandfather Adler. He's a giant man, seven feet tall, with a chest and belly that look like a Pleidean swamp tree. His arms are too long and his legs are too short. His bright blue eyes are covered with bright orange cataracts.

I squeeze through a group of Vegans, thread my way among the ten-foot moonsiders who are dancing like shadows, climb over a prostrate Venusian, shove past some Plutonian miners, and edge around a quad game involving a bomash peddler and something from the Horsehead Nebula. Now I get a better look at my old, old buddy.

How old? Grandfather Adler must be two hundred years old. His face is full of old-man bags and old-man wrinkles, like the face of a Centurian centaur.

I go past the bar where J. C. Flipson is serving Megan tranrelaxos, carefully circle the hatchethead clique, bump into a Sirian sculptor with only seven crests, and then . . .

"Grandfather Adler!"

"Ay, boy. What is it?"

"You've seen the wonders of the universe, Grandfather Adler. You've seen them all."

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"Ay, boy."

"You've seen the silver moons and the blue suns and the rusty star dust and the sepia radiation motes, you've seen green cliffs and opal water, you've seen the beauty dance of the Gilly people."

"Ay, boy."

"You've sailed purple seas and walked in twilight lands that no other man has seen or ever will see, you've warped through a star core and you've garked the bip—and still you're the same old Grandfather Adler."

"Ay, boy."

"But . . . you're unhappy."

"Ay, boy."

Around his neck there's a little brown bag.

"Grandfather Adler, what do you have in that little brown bag around your neck?"

"Earth from Earth, boy."

"Earth? They blew her up fifty years ago."

"Ay, boy."

"What kind of Earth do you have, Grandfather Adler?"

"A little bunch of grass and a little bit of dirt. I'm not sure—I haven't looked at it for ten years. Do you know what grass is? I got it just before they blew her up. A little bunch of grass and a little bit of dirt."

"Why are you unhappy, Grandfather Adler? You've seen the whole universe. Why do you carry a bag of Earth?"

Behind us, the Martians tune up their throbbing strings and skirkling pipes. Enter a chorus of anti-matter chicks from New Cairo.

"All your life you've carried a bag of Earth."

"No, boy. All my life a bag of Earth has carried me."

Before I can answer, we are disturbed by the TVtowners, who come prancing into the establishment. J. C. Flipson pops the big flutist; taking a hint, the rest of us pile on, so to speak, and beat up every cutie-mutie in the bunch (just for fun, remember). In the scuffle, Grandfather Adler disappears—I hunt all night, but he's gone for good.

I wonder why he's so unhappy. It's a great big wonderful universe.

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*All the world loves a lover—providing only that he keeps himself properly outfitted in up-to-date cars . . .*

# ROMANCE IN A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY USED-CAR LOT

*by Robert F. Young*

THE CAR-DRESS STOOD ON A PEDestal in the Big Jim display window, and a sign beneath it said:

THIS BEAUTIFUL NEW CHEMMY IS GOING GOING GONE FOR ONLY $6499.99! GENEROUS TRADE-IN ALLOWANCE ON YOUR PRESENT CAR-DRESS—HARDTOP HAT THROWN IN FREE!

Arabella didn't mean to slam on her brakes, but she couldn't help herself. She had never seen a car-dress quite so stunning. And for only $6499.99!

It was Monday afternoon and the spring street was filled with homeward-hurrying office workers, the April air with the beeping of horns. The Big Jim establishment stood near the corner next to a large used-car lot with a Cape Cod fence around it. The architecture of the building was American Colonial, but the effect was marred by a huge neon sign projecting from the façade. The sign said: BERNIE, THE BIG JIM MAN.

The beeping of horns multiplied, and belatedly realizing that she was holding up traffic, Arabella cut in front of an old man wearing a fuchsia Grandrapids and pulled over on the concrete shoulder in front of the display window.

Seen at close range, the car-dress was less dazzling, but still irresistible to the eye. Its sleek turquoise flanks and its sequinned grille gleamed in the slanted rays of the sun. Its tailfinned bustle protruded like the twin wakes of a catamaran. It was a beautiful creation, even by modern manufacturing standards, and a bargain worth taking advantage of. Even so, Arabella would have let it go by if it hadn't been for the hardtop hat.

A dealer—presumably Bernie—wearing an immaculate two-toned Lansing de mille advanced to meet her when she drove in the



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door. "Can I help you, madam?" he asked, his voice polite, but his eyes, behind his speckless windshield, regarding the car-dress she was wearing with obvious contempt.

Shame painted Arabella's cheeks a bright pink. Maybe she *had* waited too long to turn the dress in for a new one at that. Maybe her mother was right: maybe she *was* too indifferent to her clothes. "The dress in the window," she said. "Do—do you really throw in a hardtop hat with it?"

"We most certainly do. Would you like to try it on?"

"Please."

The dealer turned around and faced a pair of double doors at the rear of the room. "Howard!" he called, and a moment later the doors parted and a young man wearing a denim-blue pickup drove in. "Yes sir?"

"Take the dress in the window back to the dressing room and get a hardtop hat to match it out of the stockroom." The dealer turned around to Arabella. "He'll show you where to go, madam."

The dressing room was just beyond the double doors and to the right. The young man wheeled in the dress, then went to get the hat. He hesitated after he handed it to her, and an odd look came into his eyes. He started to say something, then changed his mind and drove out of the room.

She closed and locked the door and changed hurriedly. The upholstery-lining felt deliciously cool against her body. She donned the hardtop hat and surveyed herself in the big three-way mirror. She gasped.

The tailfinned bustle was a little disconcerting at first (the models she was accustomed to did not stick out quite so far behind), but the chrome-sequinned grille and the flush fenders did something for her figure that had never been done for it before. As for the hardtop hat—well, if the evidence hadn't been right there before her eyes, she simply wouldn't have believed that a mere hat, even a hardtop one, could achieve so remarkable a transformation. She was no longer the tired office girl who had driven into the shop a moment ago; now she was Cleopatra . . . Bathsheba . . . Helen of Troy!

She drove self-consciously back to the display room. A look akin to awe crept into the dealer's eyes. "You're not *really* the same person I talked to before, are you?" he asked.

"Yes, I am," Arabella said.

"You know, ever since we got that dress in," the dealer went on, "I've been hoping someone would come along who was worthy of its lines, its beauty, its—its personality." He raised his eyes reverently. "Thank you, Big Jim," he said, "for sending such a person to our door." He lowered his eyes to Ara-

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bella's awed countenance. "Like to try it out?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Very well. But just around the block. I'll draw up the papers while you're gone. Not," he added hastily, "that you'll be in any way obligated to take it; but just in case you decide to, we'll be all ready to do business."

"How—how much allowance can you give me on my old dress?"

"Let's see, it's two years old, isn't it? H'm'm." The dealer frowned for a moment, then: "Look, I'll tell you what I'll do. You don't look like the type of person who'd wear a dress very hard, so I'll allow you a good, generous one thousand and two dollars. How does that sound?"

"Not—not very good." (Maybe, if she went without eating lunch for a year. . .)

"Don't forget, you're getting the hardtop hat free."

"I know, but—"

"Try it out first, and then we'll talk," the dealer said. He got a dealer's plate out of a nearby cabinet and clamped it onto her rear-end. "There, you're all set," he said, opening the door. "I'll get right to work on the papers."

She was so nervous and excited when she pulled into the street that she nearly collided with a young man wearing a white convertible, but she got control of herself quickly, and to demonstrate that she was really a competent driver, first impressions to the contrary, she overtook and passed him. She saw him smile as she went by, and a little song began in her heart and throbbed all through her. Somehow that very morning she'd just known that something wonderful was going to happen to her. A perfectly ordinary day at the office had somewhat dimmed her expectations, but now they shone forth anew.

She had to stop for a red light, and when she did so, the young man drove up beside her. "Hi," he said. "That's a swell dress you're wearing."

"Thank you."

"I know a good drive-in. Like to take in a movie with me tonight?"

"Why, I don't even know you!" Arabella said.

"My name is Harry Fourwheels. Now you know me. But I don't know you."

"Arabella. Arabella Grille . . . But I don't know you very well."

"That can be remedied. Will you go?"

"I—"

"Where do you live?"

"611 Macadam Place," she said before she thought.

"I'll stop by at eight."

"I—"

At that very moment the light changed, and before she could voice her objection, the young man was gone. Eight, she though wonderingly. Eight o'clock . . .

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After that, she simply had to take the dress. There was no other alternative. Having seen her in such a resplendent model, what would he think if she was wearing her old bucket of bolts when he showed up to take her out? She returned to the display room, signed the papers and went home.

Her father stared at her through the windshield of his three-tone Cortez when she drove into the garage and parked at the supper table. "Well," he said, "it's about time you broke down and bought yourself a new dress!"

"I guess *so*!" said her mother, who was partial to stationwagons and wore one practically all the time. "I was beginning to think you were never going to wise up to the fact that you're living in the twenty-first century and that in the twenty-first century you've got to be *seen*."

"I'm—I'm only 27," Arabella said. "Lots of girls are still single at that age."

"Not if they dress the way they should," her mother said.

"Neither one of you has said whether you liked it yet or not," Arabella said.

"Oh, I like it fine," her father said.

"Ought to catch somebody's eyes," said her mother.

"It already has."

"Well!" said her mother.

"At long last!" said her father.

"He's coming for me at eight."

"For heaven's sake, don't tell him you read books," her mother said.

"I won't. I don't, really—not any more."

"And don't mention any of those radical notions you used to have, either," said her father. "About people wearing ears because they're ashamed of the bodies God gave them."

"Now Dad, you know I haven't said things like that in years. Not since, not since—"

—Not since the Christmas office party, she went on to herself, when Mr. Upswept had patted her rearend and had said, when she repulsed him, "Crawl back into your history books, you creep. You don't belong in this century!"

"—Not since ever so long ago," she finished lamely.

Harry Fourwheels showed up at eight sharp, and she hurried down the drive to meet him. They drove off side by side, turned into Blacktop Boulevard and left the town behind them. It was a lovely night, with just enough winter lingering in the skirts of spring to paint the gibbous moon a vivid silver and to hone the stars to pulsing brightness.

The drive-in was crowded but they found two places way in the rear, not far from the edge of a small woods. They parked close together, so close their fenders

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almost touched, and presently she felt Harry's hand touch her chassis and creep tentatively around her waist, just above her tailfinned bustle. She started to draw away, but remembering Mr. Upswept's words, she bit her lip and tried to concentrate on the movie.

The movie concerned a retired vermicelli manufacturer who lived in a boarding garage. He had two ungrateful daughters, and he worshipped the concrete they drove on, and did everything in his power to keep them in luxury. To accomplish this, he had to deny himself all but the barest essentials, and consequently he lived in the poorest section of the garage and dressed in used-car suits so decrepit they belonged in the junkyard. His two daughters, on the other hand, lived in the most luxurious garages available and wore the finest car-clothes on the market. A young engineering student named Rastignac also lived in the boarding garage, and the plot concerned his efforts to invade the upper echelons of modern society and to acquire a fortune in the process. To get himself started, he chiseled enough money from his sister to outfit himself in a new Washington convertible, and contrived an invitation, through a rich cousin, to a dealer's daughter's debut. There he met one of the vermicelli manufacturer's daughters and—

Despite her best efforts, Arabella's attention wandered. Harry Fourwheels' hand had abandoned her waist in favor of her headlights and had begun a tour of inspection. She tried to relax, but she felt her body stiffen instead, and heard her tense voice whisper, "Don't, please don't!"

Harry's hand fell away. "After the show, then?"

It was a way out and she grabbed it. "After the show," she said.

"I know a swell spot up in the hills. Okay?"

"Okay," she heard her frightened voice say.

She shuddered, and patted her headlights back in place. She tried to watch the rest of the movie, but it wasn't any use. Her mind kept drifting off to the hills and she kept trying to think of some excuse, any excuse, that would extricate her from her predicament. But she couldn't think of a single one, and when the movie ended she followed Harry through the exit and drove beside him down Blacktop Boulevard. When he turned off into a dirt road, she accompanied him resignedly.

Several miles back in the hills, the road paralleled the local nudist reservation. Through the high electric fence, the lights of occasional cottages could be seen twinkling among the trees. There were no nudists abroad, but Arabella shuddered just the same. Once, she had felt mildly sympathetic to-

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ward them, but since the Mr. Upswept incident, she had been unable even to think of them without a feeling of revulsion. In her opinion Big Jim gave them a much better break than they deserved; but then, she supposed, he probably figured that some of them would repent someday and ask forgiveness for their sins. It was odd, though, that none of them ever did.

Harry Fourwheels made no comment, but she could sense his distaste, and even though she knew that it stemmed from a different source than hers did, she experienced a brief feeling of camaraderie toward him. Maybe he wasn't quite as predatory as his premature passes had led her to think. Maybe, at heart, he was as bewildered as she was by the codes of conduct that regulated their existence—codes that meant one thing in one set of circumstances, and the diametrical opposite in another set. Maybe . . .

About a mile past the reservation, Harry turned into a narrow road that wound among oaks and maples into a park-like clearing. Diffidently, she accompanied him, and when he parked beneath a big oak, she parked beside him. She regretted it instantly when she felt his hand touch her chassis and begin its relentless journey toward her headlights again. This time her voice was anguished: "Don't!"

"What do you mean, don't!" Harry said, and she felt the hard pressure of his chassis against hers, and the fumbling of his fingers around her headlights. She managed, some how, to wheel out of his grasp, and find the road that led out of the clearing, but a moment later he was abreast of her, edging her toward the ditch. "Please!" she cried, but he paid no attention and moved in even closer. She felt his fender touch hers, and instinctively she shied away. Her right front wheel lost purchase, and she felt her whole chassis toppling. Her hardtop hat fell off, caromed off a rock and into a thicket. Her right front fender crumpled against a tree. Harry's wheels spun furiously and a moment later the darkness devoured the red dots of his headlights.

There was the sound of treetoad and katydid and cricket, and far away, the traffic sound of Blacktop Boulevard. There was another sound too—the sound her sobs made as they wrenched free from her throat. Gradually, though, the sound subsided as the pain dulled, and the wound began to knit.

It would never knit wholly, though. Arabella knew that. Any more than the Mr. Upswept wound had. She recovered her hardtop hat and eased back onto the road. The hat was dented on top, and a ragged scratch marred

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its turquoise sheen. A little tear ran down her cheek as she put it on and patted it into place.

But the hat represented only half her problem. There was the crumpled right fender to contend with too. What in the world was she going to do? She didn't dare show up at the office in the morning in such a disheveled state. Someone would be sure to turn her in to Big Jim if she did, and he'd find out how she'd been secretly defying him all these years by owning only one car outfit when he'd made it perfectly clear that he expected everybody to own at least two. Suppose he took her license away and relegated her to the nudist reservation? She didn't think he would for such a minor deviation, but it was a possibility that she had to take into consideration. The mere thought of such a fate surfeited her with shame.

In addition to Big Jim, there were her parents to be considered too. What was she going to tell *them*? She could just see them when she came down to breakfast in the morning. She could hear them too. "So you wrecked it already!" her father said. "I've had hundreds of car-dresses in my life," said her mother, "and I never wrecked a single one, and here you go out and get one one minute and smash it up the next!"

Arabella winced. She couldn't possibly go through with it. Some way, some how, she had to get the dress repaired tonight. But where? Suddenly she remembered a sign she'd noticed in the display window that afternoon—a sign which her preoccupation with the car-dress had crowded out of her awareness: *24 hour service.*

She drove back to town as fast as she dared and made a bee-line for the Big Jim building. Its windows were square wells of darkness and its street door was closed tight. Her disappointment became a sick emptiness in her stomach. Had she read the sign wrong? She could have sworn that it said *24 hour service.*

She drove up to the display window and read it again. She was right: it did say *24 hour service;* but it also said, in smaller, qualifying letters, *After 6 P.M., apply at used-car lot next door.*

The same young man who had taken the dress out of the window drove up to meet her when she turned into the entrance. Howard, his name was, she remembered. He was still wearing the same denim-blue pickup, and the odd look she had noticed in his eyes before, came back when he recognized her. She had suspected it was pity; now she knew it was. "My dress," she blurted, when he braked beside her. "It's ruined! Can you fix it, please?"

He nodded. "Sure, I can fix it." He pointed to a garagette at the back of the lot. "You can take it off in there," he said.

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She drove hurriedly across the lot. Used car-dresses and -suits lay all about her in the darkness. She glimpsed her old model, and the sight of it made her want to cry. If only she'd held on to it! If only she hadn't let her better judgment be swayed by so tawdry an accouterment as a hardtop hat!

It was cold in the garagette, cold and damp. She slipped out of her dress and hat and shoved them through the doorway to Howard, being careful not to reveal herself. But she needn't have bothered, because he looked the other way when he took them. Probably he was used to dealing with modest females.

She noticed the cold much more now, without her dress, and she huddled in a corner trying to keep warm. Presently she heard someone pounding outside and she went to the single window and peeked out into the lot. Howard was working on her right front fender. She could tell from the way he was going about it that he must have straightened hundreds of them. Except for the sound of his rubber mallet, the night was silent. The street beyond the Cape Cod fence was empty, and save for a lighted window or two, the office buildings across the way were in darkness. Above the building tops, the huge Big Jim sign that pre-empted the public square in the center of town, was visible. It was an alternating sign: WHAT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR BIG JIM IS GOOD ENOUGH FOR EVERYBODY, it said on the first circuit. IF IT WASN'T FOR BIG JIM, WHERE WOULD EVERYBODY BE? it asked on the second.

*Hammer hammer hammer . . .* Suddenly she thought of a TV musical—one of a series entitled *Opera Can Be Fun When Brought Up To Date*—she'd listened to once, called *Siegfried Roads*, and she remembered the opening act in which Siegfried had kept importuning a sawed-off mechanic—supposedly his father—named Mime to build him a hot-rod superior to the Fafner model owned by the villain so that he could beat the latter in a forthcoming race at Valhalla. The hammer motif kept sounding forth on the bongo drums while Mime worked desperately on the new hot-rod, and Siegfried kept asking over and over who his real father was. *Hammer hammer hammer . .*

Howard had finished straightening her fender, and now he was working on her hardtop hat. Someone wearing a citron Providence passed in the street with a swish of tires, and a quality about the sound made her think of the time. She looked at her watch: 11:25. Her mother and father would be delighted when they asked her at breakfast what time she got in and she said, "Oh, around midnight." They were always complaining about her early hours.

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Her thoughts came back to Howard. He had finished pounding out the dent in the hardtop hat and now he was touching up the scratch. Next, he touched up the scratches on the fender, and presently he brought both hat and dress back to the garagette and shoved them through the doorway. She slipped into them quickly and drove outside.

His eyes regarded her from behind his windshield. A gentle light seemed to emanate from their blue depths. "How beautiful with wheels," he said.

She stared at him. "What did you say?"

"Nothing, really. I was thinking of a story I read once."

"Oh." She was surprised. Mechanics didn't usually go in for reading—mechanics or anyone else. She was tempted to tell him that she liked to read too, but she thought better of it. "How much do I owe you?" she asked.

"The dealer will send you a bill. I only work for him."

"All night?"

"Till twelve. I just came on when you saw me this afternoon."

"I—I appreciate your fixing my dress. I—I don't know what I would have done—" She left the sentence unfinished.

The gentle light in his eyes went out. Bleakness took its place. "Which one was it? Harry Fourwheels?"

She fought back her humiliation, forced herself to return his gaze. "Yes. Do—do you know him?"

"Slightly," Howard said, and she got the impression that slightly was enough. His face, in the tinselly radiance of the Big Jim sign, seemed suddenly older, and little lines she hadn't noticed before showed at the corners of his eyes. "What's your name?" he asked abruptly.

She told him. "Arabella," he repeated, "Arabella Grille." And then: "I'm Howard Highways."

They nodded to each other. Arabella looked at her watch. "I have to go now," she said. "Thank you very much, Howard."

"You're welcome," Howard said. "Good night."

"Good night."

She drove home through the quiet streets in the April darkness. Spring tiptoed up behind her and whispered in her ear: *How beautiful with wheels. How beautiful with wheels! . . .*

"Well," her father said over his eggs the following morning. "how was the double feature?"

"Double feature?" Arabella asked, buttering a slice of toast.

"Hah!" her father said. "So it wasn't a double feature!"

"In a way it probably was," said her mother. "Two drive-in's—one with movie and one without."

Arabella suppressed a shudder. Her mother's mind functioned

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with the directness of a TV commercial. In a way it matched the gaudy stationwagons she wore. She had on a red one now, with a bulbous grille and swept-back fins and dark heavy wipers. Again Arabella suppressed a shudder. "I—I had a nice time," she said, "and I didn't do a thing wrong."

"That's news?" said her father.

"Our chaste little 27—almost 28—year old daughter," said her mother. "Pure as the driven snow! I suppose you'll do penance now for having stayed out so late by staying in nights and reading books."

"I told you," Arabella said, "I don't read books any more."

"You might as well read them," her father said.

"I'll bet you told him you never wanted to see him again just because he tried to kiss you," said her mother. "The way you did with all the others."

"I did not!" Arabella was trembling now. "As a matter of fact I'm going out with him again tonight!"

"Well!" said her father.

"Three cheers!" said her mother. "Maybe now you'll start doing right by Big Jim and get married and raise your quota of consumers and share the burden of the economy with the rest of your generation."

"Maybe I will!"

She backed away from the table. She had never lied before and she was angry with herself. But it wasn't until she was driving to work that she remembered that a lie, once made, either had to be lived up to or admitted. And since admitting this one was unthinkable, she would have to live up to it . . . or at least give the impression that she was living up to it. That night she would have to go some place and remain there till at least midnight or her parents would suspect the truth.

The only place she could think of was a drive-in.

She chose a different one from the one Harry Fourwheels had taken her to. The sun had set by the time she got there and the main feature was just beginning. It was a full-length animated fairy tale and concerned the adventures of a cute little teen-ager named Carbonella who lived with her stepmother and her two ugly stepsisters. She spent most of her time in a corner of the garage, washing and simonizing her stepmother's and stepsisters' car-dresses. They had all sort of beautiful gowns—Washingtons and Lansings and Flints—while she, little Carbonella, had nothing but clunkers and old junk-heaps to wear. Finally, one day, the Big Jim dealer's son announced that he was going to throw a big whingding at his father's palatial garage. Immediately, the two stepsisters and the stepmother got out their best gowns for Carbonella to wash and

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simonize. Well, she washed and simonized them, and cried and cried because she didn't have a decent dress to her name and couldn't go to the whingding, and finally the night of the big event arrived and her two stepsisters and her stepmother got all chromed up in their car-gowns and took off gaily for the dealer's garage. Left behind, Carbonella sank to her knees in the car-wash corner and burst into tears. Then, just as it was beginning to look as though Big Jim had deserted her, who should appear but the Fairy Car Mother, resplendent in a shining white Lansing de mille! Quick as scat, she waved her wand, and all of a sudden there was Carbonella, radiant as a new day, garbed in a carnation-pink Grandrapids with hubcaps so bright they almost knocked your eyes out. So Carbonella got to the whingding after all, and wheeled every dance with the dealer's son while her ugly stepsisters and her stepmother did a slow burn along the wall. She was so happy she forgot that the Fairy Car Mother's spell was scheduled to expire at midnight, and if the clock on the dealer's Big Jim sign hadn't begun to dong the magic hour she might have turned back into a car-wash girl right there in the middle of the showroom floor. She zoomed out the door then, and down the ramp, but in her haste to hide herself before the spell ended, she lost one of her wheels. The dealer's son found it, and next day he made the rounds of all the garages in the Franchise, asking all the women who had attended his whingding to try it on. However, it was so small and dainty that it wouldn't even begin to fit any of their axles no matter how much grease they used. After trying it on the axles of the two ugly stepsisters, the dealer's son was about to give up when he happened to espy Carbonella sitting in the car-wash corner, simonizing a car-dress. Well, he wouldn't have it any other way than for Carbonella to come out of the corner and try the wheel on, and what do you know, there before the horrified stares of the stepsisters and the stepmother, the wheel slid smoothly into place without even a smidgin of grease being necessary! Off Carbonella went with the dealer's son, and they drove happily ever after.

Arabella glanced at her watch: 10:30. Too early to go home yet, unless she wanted to leave herself wide open to another cynical cross-examination. Grimly she settled down in her parking place to watch *Carbonella* again. She wished now that he'd checked to see what picture was playing before driving in. *Carbonella* was classified as adult entertainment, but just the same, there were more kids in the drive-in than there were grownups, and she couldn't help feeling self-conscious, park-

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ing there in her big car-dress in the midst of so many kiddy-car outfits.

She stuck it out till eleven, then she left. It was her intention to drive around till midnight, and she probably would have done just that if she hadn't decided to drive through town—and hadn't, as a consequence, found herself on the street where the used-car lot was. The sight of the Cape Cod fence evoked pleasant associations, and she instinctively slowed down when she came opposite it. By the time she reached the entrance she was virtually crawling, so when she noticed the pickup-clad figure parked in front of it, it was only natural that she should stop.

"Hi," she said, "What are you doing?"

He drove out to the curb, and when she saw his smile she was glad she had stopped. "I'm drinking a glass of April," he said.

"How does it taste?"

"Delicious. I've always been partial to April. May comes close, but it's slightly on the tepid side. As for June, July and August, they only whet my thirst for the golden wine of fall."

"Do you always talk in metaphors?"

"Only to very special people," he said. He was quiet for a moment, then: "Why don't you come in and park with me till twelve. Afterwards we'll go some place for a hamburger and a beer."

". . . All right."

Used car-dresses and -suits still littered the lot, but her old car-dress was gone. She was glad, because the sight of it would only have depressed her, and she wanted the effervescence that was beginning in her breast to continue unchecked. Continue it did. The night was quite warm for April, and it was even possible now and then to see a star or two between the massive winks of the Big Jim sign. Howard talked about himself for a while, telling her how he was going to school days and working nights, but when she asked him what school, he said he'd talked about himself long enough and now it was her turn. So she told him about her job, and about the movies she went to, and the TV programs she watched, and finally she got around to the books she used to read.

They both started talking then, first one and then the other, and the time went by like a robin flying south, and almost before she knew what had happened, there was the twelve-to-eight man driving into the lot, and she and Howard were heading for the Gravel Grille.

"Maybe," he said afterwards, when they drove down Macadam Place and paused in front of her garage, "you could stop by tomorrow night and we could drink another glass of April together. That is," he added, "if you have no other plans."

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"No," she said. "I have no other plans."

"I'll be waiting for you then," he said, and drove away.

She watched his taillights diminish in the distance, and disappear. From somewhere came the sound of singing, and she looked around in the shadows of the street to find its source. But the street was empty except for herself and she realized finally that the singing was the singing of her heart.

She thought the next day would never end, and then, when it finally did end, rain was falling out of an uninspiring sky. She wondered how April would taste in the rain, and presently she discovered —after another stint in a drive-in —that rain had little to do with the taste if the other ingredients were present. The other ingredients *were* present, and she spent another winged night talking with Howard in the used-car lot, watching the stars between the winks of the Big Jim sign, afterwards driving with him to the Gravel Grille for hamburgers and beer, and finally saying good night to him in front of her garage.

The other ingredients were present the next night, too, and the next and the next. Sunday she packed a lunch and they drove up into the hills for a picnic. Howard chose the highest one, and they climbed a winding road and parked on the crest under a windgaunt elm tree and ate the potato salad she had made, and the sandwiches, passing the coffee-thermos back and forth. Afterwards they smoked cigarettes in the afternoon wind and talked in lazy sentences.

The hilltop provided a splendid view of a wooded lake fed by a small stream. On the other side of the lake, the fence of a nudist reservation shattered the slanted rays of the sun, and beyond the fence, the figures of nudists could be seen moving about the streets of one of the reservation villages. Owing to the distance, they were hardly more than indistinguishable dots, and at first Arabella was only vaguely aware of them. Gradually, though, they penetrated her consciousness to a degree where they pre-empted all else.

"It must be horrible!" she said suddenly.

"What must be horrible?" Howard wanted to know.

"To live naked in the woods like that. Like—like savages!"

Howard regarded her with eyes as blue—and as deep—as the wooded lake. "You can hardly call them savages," he said presently. "They have machines the same as we do. They maintain schools and libraries. They have trades and professions. True, they can only practice them within the confines of the reservation, but that's hardly more limited than practicing them in a small town or even a city. All in all, I'd say they were civilized."

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"But they're naked!"

"Is it so horrible to be naked?"

He had opened his windshield and was leaning quite close to her. Now he reached up and opened her windshield too, and she felt the cool wind against her face. She saw the kiss in his eyes, but she did not draw away, and presently she felt it on her lips. She was glad, then, that she hadn't drawn away, because there was nothing of Mr. Upswept in the kiss, or of Harry Fourwheels; nothing of her father's remarks and her mother's insinuations. After a while she heard a car door open, and then another, and presently she felt herself being drawn out into the sunshine and the April wind, and the wind and the sun were cool and warm against her body, cool and warm and clean, and shame refused to rise in her, even when she felt Howard's carless chest pressing against hers.

It was a long sweet moment and she never wanted it to end. But end it did, as all moments must. "What was that?" Howard said, raising his head.

She had heard the sound too—the whirring sound of wheels—and her eyes followed his down the hillside and caught the gleaming tailgate of a white convertible just before it disappeared around a bend in the road. "Do—do you think they saw us?" she asked.

Howard hesitated perceptibly before he answered. "No, I don't think so. Probably someone out for a Sunday drive. If they'd climbed the hill we would have heard the motor."

"Not—not if there was a silencer on it," Arabella said. She slipped back into her car-dress. "I—I think we'd better go."

"All right." He started to slip back into his pickup, paused. "Will—will you come here with me next Sunday?" he asked.

His eyes were earnest, imploring. "Yes," she heard her voice say, "I'll come with you."

It was even lovelier than the first Sunday had been—warmer, brighter bluer of sky. Again Howard drew her out of her dress and held her close and kissed her, and again she felt no shame. "Come on," he said, "I want to show you something." He started down the hill toward the wooded lake.

"But you're *walking*," she protested.

"No one's here to see, so what's the difference? Come on."

She stood undecided in the wind. A brook sparkling far below decided her. "All right," she said.

The uneven ground gave her trouble at first, but after a while she got used to it, and soon she was half-skipping along at Howard's side. At the bottom of the hill they came to a grove of wild apple trees. The brook ran through it, murmuring over mossy stones. Howard lay face down on the

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bank and lowered his lips to the water. She followed suit. The water was winter-cool, and the coolness went all through her, raising goose bumps on her skin.

They lay there side by side. Above them, leafshoots and limbs arabesqued the sky. Their third kiss was even sweeter than its predecessors. "Have you been here before?" she asked when at last they drew apart.

"Many times," he said.

"Alone?"

"Always alone."

"But aren't you afraid Big Jim might find out?"

He laughed. "Big Jim? Big Jim is an artificial entity. The automakers dreamed him up to frighten people into wearing their cars so that they would buy more of them and turn them in more often, and the government co-operated because without increased car-turnover, the economy would have collapsed. It wasn't hard to do, because people had been wearing their cars unconsciously all along. The trick was to make them wear them consciously—to make them self-conscious about appearing in public places without them; ashamed, if possible. That wasn't hard to do either—though of course the size of the cars had to be cut way down, and the cars themselves had to be designed to approximate the human figure."

"You shouldn't say such things. It's—it's blasphemy! Anyone would think you were a nudist."

He looked at her steadily. "Is it so despicable to be a nudist?" he asked. "Is it less despicable, for example, to be a dealer who hires shills like Harry Fourwheels to sway undecided women customers and to rough up their purchases afterwards so that they can't take advantage of the 24-hour clause in their sales contract? . . . I'm sorry, Arabella, but it's better for you to know."

She had turned away so that he would not see the tears rivuleting down her cheeks. Now she felt his hand touch her arm, creep gently round her waist. She let him draw her to him and kiss her tears away, and the re-opened wound closed again, this time forever.

His arms tightened around her. "Will you come here with me again?"

"Yes," she said. "If you want me to."

"I want you to very much. We'll take off our cars and run through the woods. We'll thumb our noses at Big Jim. We'll—"

Click, something went in the bushes on the opposite bank.

She went taut in Howard's arms. The bushes quivered, and a uniformed shape grew out of them. A cherubic face beamed at them across the ripples. A big square hand raised and exhibited a portable audio-video recorder. "Come on you two," a big voice said. "Big Jim wants to see you."

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The Big Jim judge regarded her disapprovingly through the windshield of his black Cortez when they brought her before him. "Well, that wasn't very nice of you, was it?" he said. "Taking off your clothes and cavorting with a nudist."

Arabella's face grew pale behind her windshield. "A nudist!" she said disbelievingly. "Why, Howard's not a nudist. He can't be!"

"Oh yes he can be. As a matter of fact, he's even worse than a nudist. He's a *voluntary* nudist. We realize, however," the judge went on, "that you had no way of knowing it, and in a way we are to blame for your becoming involved with him, because if it hadn't been for our inexcusable lack of vigilance he wouldn't have been able to lead the double life he did—going to a nudist teachers' institute days and sneaking out of the reservation nights and working in a used-car lot and trying to convert nice people like yourself to his way of thinking. Consequently, we're going to be lenient with you. Instead of revoking your license we're going to give you another chance—let you go home and atone for your reprehensible conduct by apologizing to your parents and by behaving yourself in the future. Incidentally, you've got a lot to thank a young man named Harry Fourwheels for."

"Have—have I?"

"You certainly have. If it hadn't been for his alertness and his loyalty to Big Jim we might not have discovered your dereliction until it was too late."

"Harry Fourwheels," Arabella said wonderingly. "He must hate me very much."

"*Hate* you? My dear girl, he—"

"And I think I know why," Arabella went on, unaware of the interruption. "He hates me because he betrayed to me what he really is, and in his heart he despises what he really is. Why . . . that's why Mr. Upswept hates me too!"

"See here, Miss Grille, if you're going to talk like that, I may have to reconsider my decision. After all—"

"And my mother and father," Arabella continued. "They hate me because they've also betrayed to me what they really are, and in their hearts they despise themselves too. Even cars can't hide that kind of nakedness. And Howard. He loves me. He doesn't hate what he really is—any more than I hate what I really am. What—what have you done with him?"

"Escorted him back to the reservation, of course. What else could we do with him? I assure you, though, that he won't be leading a double life any more. And now, Miss Grille, as I've already dismissed your case, I see no reason for you to remain any longer. I'm a busy man and—"

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"How does a person become a voluntary nudist, Judge?"

"By willful exhibitionism. Good day, Miss Grille."

"Good day . . . and thank you."

She went home first to pack her things. Her mother and father were waiting up for her in the kitchen.

"Filthy hussy!" her mother said.

"To think that a daughter of mine—" said her father.

She drove through the room without a word, and up the ramp to her bedroom. Packing did not take long: except for her books, she owned very little. Back in the kitchen, she paused long enough to say good by. Her parents' faces fell apart. "Wait," said her father. "Wait!" cried her mother. Arabella drove out the door without a single glance into her rear-view mirror.

After leaving Macadam Place, she headed for the public square. Despite the lateness of the hour, there were still quite a few people She took off her hardtop hat first. Next she took off her car-dress. Then she stood there in the winking radiance of the Big Jim sign in the center of the gathering crowd and waited for the vice squad to come and arrest her.

It was morning when they escorted her to the reservation. Above the entrance, a sign said: UNAUTHORIZED PERSONNEL KEEP OUT. A line of fresh black paint had been brushed across the words, and above them other words had been hastily printed: WEARING OF MECHANICAL FIG LEAVES PROHIBITED. The guard on her left glowered behind his windshield. "Some more of their smart-aleck tricks!" he grumbled.

Howard met her just inside the gate. When she saw his eyes she knew that it was all right, and in a moment she was in his arms, her nakedness forgotten, crying against his lapel. He held her tightly, his hands pressing hard against the fabric of her coat. She heard his voice over the bleak years: "I knew they were watching us, and I let them catch us together in hopes that they'd send you here. Then, when they didn't, I hoped—I prayed—that you'd come voluntarily. Darling, I'm so glad you did! You'll love it here. I have a cottage, with a big back yard. There's a community swimming pool, a woman's club, an amateur-players group, a—"

"Is there a minister?" she asked through her tears.

He kissed her. "A minister, too. If we hurry, we can catch him before he starts out on his morning rounds."

They walked down the lane together.

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*Brutality is not an unfamiliar ingredient in science fiction, no more so than in many other types of fiction. Indeed many crime novels and "popular" novels are so heavily laced with brutality that the reader often skips over violent passages, muttering, "All right, all right—so what happened* after *her teeth were kicked out?"—the violence becoming an unreal plot gimmick with which the reader is not personally involved. Such is not the case in this shockingly persuasive comment on the cruelty man finds it possible to inflict on man.*

# WHO DREAMS OF IVY

*by Will Worthington*

IT WAS THE WEEK OF BLINDness. While Mr. Oakes bent over his power-mower and hummed to himself, the Mayor and six of his bully boys exercised their bloody prerogatives in the house across the street.

*Stare hard at that little carburetor*—not *at the big, ragged star of blood on the face of Morgan's house.* Not *at the headless carcass of Morgan's terrier there on the grass. Barked at one of the uniforms, poor ignorant beast. Dropped her with his glorified cleaver and flung her against the house like a tomato. Big laughs all around. Dogs can't know about the Week of Blindness. Be deaf also to Joanne Morgan screaming upstairs. The bedroom.*

Oakes was a wishbone between Morgan's house and his own. He had warned Al Morgan about the risk of civil disobedience, dammit, and he had told him and he had *told* him. Then his *own wife* had berated him for meddling. Made him feel like a spanked kid. To vindicate himself he had reopened the old argument about taking the kids to the May Festival. They *would* go, dammit. *He* had the *Law* on his side, that time, at least. Still . . . why did he feel like a dog with drawn teeth? The whole issue of the May Festival had been a red herring and he was



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left with a gut-griping sense of denial. Was a man not to be taken seriously in his own home? Could no one see how *right* he was? A wife should respect her husband—his authority. *She*—all of the ladies, in fact—seemed oblivious to the whole import of the Week of Blindness. To the whole grownup world, when it came to that.

A new crescendo of violent sounds from Morgan's place. Could his old friend ever be helped again? On one hand was the horror which would not be denied; on the other, though, that sense of vindication—or *rightness*.

He could hear his wife and her friend Ethel Suggs, invisible but all too audible behind the front-door screen. They were having one of their endless, snarly, land-sakes type conversations, the theme of which seemed to be the manifest untrustworthiness of men whose lives are *supposed* to be dedicated to the repair and maintenance of automatic laundry equipment and dishwasher-garbage-disposal units, for heaven's sakes. Mr. Oakes made the silent observation that the voices of women tended to become more aggressively nasal as Spring wore on into Summer.

The women whinier and the kids shriller. Kids!

Jerry, the boy, could not have selected a worse time to come home from school if he'd worked it out on a chart. It was not bad enough that he was scuffing the finish off his shoes and kicking an empty beer can; he had to *sing*. And of all the songs to be singing *at this time, in this place*! *"Welcome May"*!

Welcome May, indeed. The trick was to live through the last week of April. Children didn't quite grasp the idea of the Week of Blindness either. Now the boy would notice the mess across the street—the gory splash on the front of the Morgans' house, the dead dog on the lawn, the squad car parked at the crazy angle, its right front wheel up on the curb, the shards of broken glass everywhere. If *those* things didn't excite his damnable boyish curiosity—delight, even—the drunken cursing and laughter would, not to mention the spasmodic screams.

But the boy didn't seem to notice anything. Mr. Oakes watched his son and didn't know whether to be relieved at this unexpected indifference or to begin worrying about some new, overriding complication. Twelve was a certain age, and would that it could be skipped or somehow circumvented.

"Hi, Dad." Yes, he looked guilty. He had an envelope in his hand too. That picky, moralistic Harper. Where would a boy get an envelope but from the principal's office?

Then the Mayor and his men came out. It was not enough that a citizen spent his life suspended over an abyss of anxiety; he was

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put to the task of selecting over which pit to hang. Mr. Oakes decided to *appear* to concern himself with his probably erring son but to dedicate that somehow more incisive peripheral vision to the latent menace across the street.

"Well, son?"

The boy did a good job on his shoes, scraping them methodically from the outer periphery forward to the toe and turning his ankle unnaturally so that the sidewalk would get the full benefit of the abrading process. How much were boys' shoes now—twelve dollars? Fifteen? One had to think of something.

The cops permitted themselves to stagger somewhat more wildly than the Mayor, who seemed to have achieved that stately form of drunkenness in which he moved like a balance climber on a treacherous hogsback, and even his belching and hiccupping had a pontifical quality. All their faces were swollen with edema and laughter—reddish with highlights of lavender—and if they came too close you would flinch a little waiting for them to burst.

The cops began to argue about where next to indulge their official prerogatives, and one of them kept repeating something like "Lesh go't th' Big Or'nge Drive-in . . . Dames." But the Mayor just stood there, swaying very slightly, his paunch thrust out importantly.

Mr. Oakes hoped that he wasn't looking at him (Not *my* house! Not *my* family!), but without looking up he knew his hope was forlorn. The awful whimsy of the brutally drunk always seems to find its way to that person who is trying hardest not to exist at the moment. Some sort of psychic vacuum must be generated, which directs the homing process of the aggressor.

And of course it was at that moment, too, that his youngest, Linda, aged three and a half, had to begin whooping and laughing about "The funny Santa Claus" from her vantage point behind the screen. Why the hell couldn't her mother make her be quiet? Mr. Oakes made another mental note to the effect that psychokinesis did not either work; not the tightest or most intense beam of concentrated thought from off his aching mind would reduce the child's voice a single decibel, nor all his anguish hone down the edge of it.

And so the Mayor came over.

"What's your name, m'boy?" he asked Jerry.

"Jerry," said Jerry.

"Your Honor," said Mr. Oakes in a whisper with enough force behind it to rupture his larynx. The Mayor just looked at him slowly and with contempt needling its way out through the film of blear.

"Let the lad speak for himself, citizen," snapped the Mayor.

"Of course, your Honor."

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The Mayor put a meaty hand on the boy's shoulder, staggering slightly and causing the boy to buckle for a moment.

"Are you going to the May Festival, boy?"

Oakes wanted to be sick. He did not know how *he* would answer that question. What a blundering kid would do with such a diplomatic booby trap turned back thought. Civic duty on one hand, and on the other . . . Oh Lord!

"Yes *sir!*" said Jerry, grinning happily while his father listened to kettledrums somewhere deep in his ears. Couldn't the fool kid be a little less gleeful? Cotton candy at a funeral. Nevertheless the Mayor beamed down upon the boy and said, "See that you do, son. See that you do." Oakes was fascinated by the man's face—Santa Claus with a killer's eyes.

"See that he does," said the Mayor, addressing Oakes. "You know your duties as a citizen, I hope."

"Oh yes indeed, your Honor . . . *Sir*. We always . . . I mean, I never . . . that is . . ."

"Well see that he does, citizen. See that he does."

Oakes hoped that the Mayor and his bully-boys would not hear his brain screaming in there by itself: Go now! Please, please just GO and let us alone! He could see the swaying cops across the street, caps askew, neckties loosened, clothes disordered in strangely disturbing ways. And then—was it possible?—the Mayor turned, snarled something at his men and they squeezed their beefy bodies into the squad car and with violent noises from engine and tires, incredibly, were gone.

Oakes was too relieved to realize that he had been humiliated. It did not occur to him for some time. He started to make a show of candor by tinkering with his power-mower again, but Jerry continued to stand there honing his shoes on the pavement, and then Oakes remembered the letter.

"Mr. Harper called me into his office, Dad. This note . . ."

"Well then, what have you done now?" said Oakes.

"Oh, no one special, particular *thing*," said Jerry.

"Well go to my den and wait for me. We'll talk about it."

The truth was that Mr. Oakes did not feel overly stern at that moment. He did not feel that he had had time to recharge his fund of parental authority. It was not—he told himself—that he had too recently emerged from a frightening schoolboy dilemma of his own. What he felt, as his mind cleared, was a slow upsurge of certitude and a spreading glow of general rightness, which wanted some more profound—even saintly expression than a mere exercise in parental iron could afford. The latter would be too limiting, scarcely a worthy dramatic vehicle.

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The week had begun badly and had seemed to degenerate steadily with the anxieties, tension and domestic unpleasantries which were to be expected during any Week of Blindness, but as Mr. Oakes felt himself being drawn towards the ravaged house across the street the downward journey took on the exhilarating pace and the exciting irreversibility of a long, steep *schuss* on a ski-slope. There was that intoxicating sense of *rightness* . . .

The door of Morgan's house was ajar, and he could see the boot-marks, frozen violence, on its panels as he walked in. He did not ring the bell or use the knocker. That would have been like saying "May I?" when you tried the door of an overturned automobile. Privacy is a sort of virginity which, once violated, even unjustly, is never again much regarded. Victims *are* victims.

The livingroom was a mass of broken furniture and glassware. What had not been broken was merely overturned, or had been thrown from one of the windows, from which not merely the glass but the sashes had been broken. Morgan was not in sight, but he could hear Morgan's wife sobbing upstairs. Finally he heard feeble groans from a closet. He raised his leg to smash the door with his heel but was arrested in mid-kick by a flat female voice behind his back. This unnerved him badly in spite of the familiarity of the voice, and he was shocked at the fragility of his own new confidence.

"Don't creep *up* on me that way!" he shouted, still standing on one foot like some sort of unwieldy wading bird.

"Land sakes," said Mrs. Oakes. "There *is* a key in the closet door, you know. Can't you be any better than *they* were?"

Ethel Suggs came in too, but she went upstairs to Morgan's wife immediately, with hardly a glance at the demolished parlor.

Damn women, anyway!

"Why don't you see to Joanne upstairs?"

It wasn't at all clear to Oakes what "seeing to" a woman in such circumstances could involve, but he felt an overpowering need now to say something in the imperative mood. His wife turned and left without replying.

He felt the need to act in a brusque, imperious way too, and he realized dimly that he was acting overzealously when he dragged Morgan from the closet—even before the battered man screamed. His shoulder was visibly out of joint or broken. In another place he might not have recognized his face. When Morgan finally spoke it was as unlikely as hearing a song come from a handful of feathers and carrion in a ditch.

"Leave me be, for God sake! Doctor . . . Joanne . . ."

"The women are looking out for

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her, old man. Just relax now. Just relax . . ."

The brutal part of it was that he *knew* how fatuous it sounded.

"Just relax," said Morgan, and then he laughed. Oakes wished he hadn't. He was sure that he'd never heard such an awful sound from a man. "Just lie back and enjoy it, eh? It's all over now, and nothing matters. We're all *safe* . . . is that what you mean? *Safe* for oh lordy such a long, long time."

Oakes heard one of the women come downstairs and begin dialing the phone. Then he heard himself talking to Morgan, and it was like a dream he'd had earlier in the week. In this dream he saw himself being dragged into a mare's nest of broken bones and gobbets of red flesh by long tendrils of what must have been dark green ivy. He wanted to help himself—this other helpless man who just submitted to the green tentacles—but his feet were as nerveless as the clay that held them fast. All he could do was talk, talk, talk. He sounded like a judge or like a sanctimonious gymnasium instructor he'd had back in school.

"But that's how things *are*, old man. It's a shame it had to be *you* and Joanne, but that's the way it *is* . . . the system . . ."

He heard himself utter every platitude about civic duty and Our Debt to the Community and the Tradition of Sacrifice that he himself had ever heard from loudspeakers and lecture platforms in his whole life.

And this too was irreversible. It was like the dream.

"Why don't you let him alone?" said his wife, who bent over Morgan and began swabbing his face delicately with a moist washcloth. "Hasn't there been enough meddling for one day?"

"It's all right. Quite all right," said Morgan weakly. The man on the floor permitted himself a somewhat damaged smile. "Old Oakesy is entirely *right*, Mrs. Oakes."

Back in his own house, Oakes poured himself a bit more than four fingers of brandy and drained it without tasting it particularly. It was good brandy, and at any other time he would have treated it as such. He was pouring another when his wife came through the door.

"Jerry has a note from his principal."

"I know that," said Oakes, unable to keep from sounding a little like an angry school principal himself.

"Well you *are* going to talk to him, aren't you?"

"I am, when I'm ready, going to talk to him. Yes." He drained off the second dollop of brandy and when it had settled inside, eased forth a tentative belch.

"Well drinking, I mean. . . ." suggested Mrs. Oakes, now a bit

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anxiously. "Is it quite the thing when you're. . . ."

"The *thing*," roared Oakes, now suddenly freed from some constricting inner shell, ". . . is that I've had it up to the earlobes with being told what-for in my own house. I just may get thoroughly bagged before I talk to anybody about anything . . . ever! Have I made myself completely clear?"

Mrs. Oakes actually shrank and whimpered some sort of apology. Oakes was mildly surprised at this reaction, inasmuch as it was the first time in his memory that such a thing had happened, but his surprise did not sap his momentum. Like many men who rarely permit themselves the luxury of anger, he wanted to ride his to the end of the line.

"And furthermore, we are not going to argue about the May Festival any more. We're going and the kids are going, just like any other good citizens. That's *that*, and there's nothing more to discuss. Hear me?"

Mrs. Oakes was fighting tears now, but in a small, strange voice she managed to answer, and she even managed to hang a shred of opinion on her answer.

"Of course, dear. Of course. But *you* know what I meant. I meant . . . do we have to stay to the *end*? The *whole thing* is what I mean. Linda is just a little girl. There are just a few years when they don't have to . . ."

Oakes saw that his wife was going to blubber if he let the conversation go any further and that, he knew, would be the intolerable extra thing that would overbalance that rare feeling of utter rightness, which had come to him, it seemed, only after endless strife. The glow was too hard-won and precious to lose; he felt as though all his forty-odd years were invested in it. He withdrew then to his study where the boy waited with his nasty little token from Mr. Harper.

Jerry looked guilty and scared, and this only inflamed Mr. Oakes and fed his rectitude. It was as though he sat on a see-saw of righteousness and the growing weight of any guilt not clearly his own raised him by that much, inversely.

"Well, let's see Harper's letter."

The boy handed him the letter. It was in an envelope but was not sealed.

"You read it, I suppose."

"No, Dad. No, I didn't. I wanted to though."

Oakes found himself wishing that the envelope had been sealed so that he could have ripped it open with a fine savage gesture of impatience and contempt. The letter was lengthy:

*Dear Mr. Oakes,*

*It is sometimes difficult for an educator to draw the line between responsibility properly his own*

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*and that which belongs to the parent . . .*

How mealy-mouthed could you get?

*. . . Gerald is an apt student and shows much promise. My concern is that, in one important sense, he displays* too much *promise. I regret to say that the boy has demonstrated certain tendencies, in the classroom but more particularly in the schoolyard during play-periods, which concern me as a teacher and should, I feel, receive corrective attention by you as a parent.*

*I feel that it is not too late to rectify these minor flaws of character, and I feel especially that this fortunate juncture not only in the boy's life but in the life of the community, offers the best and quite possibly the only opportunity to correct these unfortunate tendencies before they become irrevocable and possibly tragic.*

*Because of the nature of these difficulties, I would prefer to discuss Gerald's problems with you or with Mrs. Oakes in the privacy of my office, at your convenience, of course.*

*Greetings of the season to you and your family.*

*Very sincerely,*
Wallace P. Harper

"He feels! He would prefer!" said Oakes, beginning a climb to the summit of rage, then becoming conscious of his large-eyed son and checking himself. It was one thing to rage at Harper's chalky verbosity and his cowardly avoidance of the point of all this solicitude, but it would not do to let the boy see how it enraged him.

"I'll have a talk with that old-maid schoolteacher right *now*," he shouted nevertheless, and he gathered up his coat, his hat and a large cigar and left the screen-door twanging behind him. It did not occur to him to ask Jerry what it was all about.

"Oh dear! Oh dear!" said Mrs. Oakes as she stood in the doorway wringing her thin hands and watching Oakes stride down the street.

But she didn't try to stop him.

Wallace Harper was a frail, gray man who had grown a resilient armor of soft speech and manners about himself. He'd had to. He was a man who had coped with things, or, as it usually happened, with people who presented themselves to him when their grievances were most active and, consequently, their manners at their worst. He coped with city and state officials, with recalcitrant students, with teachers on the point of joining foreign armies, and with parents who knew—just as Mr. Harper well knew—that *their* children were unique and special. They were all, of course—

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grownups and children alike, the arrogant, demanding, anguished, rebellious, or despairing—all unique and special, and each requiring his custom blend of patience and toughness. An English teacher who had been trying to tell her literature students about imagery once compared Mr. Harper to a chewed-out bit of gristle. Mr. Oakes was not the first person who had raged at him that day. One did not expect the Week of Blindness to be a serene and tolerant time.

"Just what the hell do you mean by *'tendencies'?*" Mr. Oakes had begun, even before Harper had offered him a chair in his office. "You leave me with the idea that the boy has committed some kind of *perversion* or something. Just what do you mean by *'unfortunate tendencies'?*"

Mr. Oakes knew that his breath, by this time, would kill low-flying hawks, but far from being shy about this, he took a certain pride in it. He was, after all, an adult—a *citizen*. He leaned unnecessarily close to Harper as he shouted. Harper neither flinched nor frowned, and his voice, though quiet, had no quaver in it.

"I'll come to the point, now that you're here, Mr. Oakes. The tendencies of which I spoke are not perversions in the sense of . . . say, the sordid things one hears about. Certainly not. But I am concerned with something not entirely removed from these other things—something at least potentially graver, Mr. Oakes."

Oakes shrank a little. The protest he'd been on the point of hurling bomblike into Harper's precise phraseology suddenly hung fire. "Graver? Wha . . ."

"I am talking about leadership tendencies, Mr. Oakes."

Oakes heard himself protesting, denying and rejecting even before the full enormity of the suggestion had penetrated. It was the kind of thing that was too large to attack with the weapons of civilization. He rose to his feet and shook both fists at Harper, who still did not flinch.

"Just what the hell do *you mean*. What leadership tendencies? How do you know? Where do you get off saying a thing like that about a kid. You damned civil service intellectuals are a *danger* with your unfounded charges! A *danger*, Harper. Just what the hell *do you mean?*"

"I mean," said Harper, scarcely raising his voice at all, "that Gerald frequently behaves just as you are behaving right now. Overassertive, overaggressive, over . . ."

"A positive *danger!*" Mr. Oakes was still saying. But he had a choice: he could clobber Harper and make matters worse, or he could hear him out and take his anger and embarrassment outdoors. Something beyond mere petulance had him now, some-

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thing foreign, something not new but connected with the Week of Blindness, or with the bad dream about the ivy and the mare's nest. It was that immovable sense of ultimate *rightness* again. It—not mere timidity, which he did not feel—governed. He listened. Harper went on as though never interrupted.

"I would suggest, Mr. Oakes, that you be very sure that Gerald attends the May Festival tomorrow. Not just TV, you understand. The real thing with all the sights, sounds and . . . well *atmosphere* of the occasion. It will not do for children to see only half of reality, Mr. Oakes. The rewards, the privileges, the prerogatives. They must also see . . ."

Oakes had regained it by now—the rightness that made anger unnecessary. He rose, and when he found his voice, *it* sounded different too—the voice and something about the language.

"We do not need to be advised of our civic responsibilities, Harper. We require no instruction from you."

Mr. Harper, still not put out, merely nodded slowly as Oakes left his office.

Mr. Oakes felt a little raw inside but oddly steady when the alarm went off the next morning. He had slept less than an hour, having been unable to drop off even after the town bells had rung out the tidings that the Seven Years and the Week of Blindness were over at last. Most fathers in the town would have gone to bed much relieved after that, and a younger Oakes would have gone out to join in the revelry, but not this Oakes. He had done a little more drinking, the better to enjoy or to control this unreal feeling left over from the dream, or from the incident in the Morgans' house, or the quarrels with his wife or with Wallace Harper. It was all of these things, he supposed, but it would not be explained away. His face felt tight, his eyes were a little puffy and he got unpleasant repeats of brandy from time to time but with it all there was this peculiar feeling of steadiness, and it was part of the Rightness too.

His wife had on her bleak, long-suffering expression, but he found that this did not concern him as it might have at another time. He was more interested in the excitement shown by Jerry and little Linda. Linda was gleeful because it was going to be a Festival—that was enough. You could hear the bands playing already. Jerry was excited too, but in a more solemn twelve-year-old way. He could remember another such day. It had been a long time ago and he hadn't been much older than his baby sister now was, but in the meantime he had learned, through kid channels mostly, what was implied. Jerry walked with his moth-

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er, who had a tendency to drag, but little Linda heard the bands and the fire-crackers and kept running ahead, laughing and squealing her impatience with the old folks.

Most of the townspeople were already in the square and the adjoining streets. Ed Feister had set up an extra bar—planks on beer-kegs—in front of his tavern, and he was already serving the free beer, mostly to people who were still at it from the night before. A crude sign read, "Bring your own glasses," and one man lurched joyously by with a small fishbowl brimming with the brew. Old Pop Pappadakis had moved his soft-drink and hot-dog wagon right into the square and was enjoying the hectic prosperity that falls to such men on festive occasions.

There was the traditional rivalry of the brass bands. The Grange was blatting away at one end of the square while the volunteer firemen were meeting their challenge with the largest *Glockenspiel* section in the state. The total effect was not music, but it was something stirring and contagious which quickened the feet.

It was also a day for people to proclaim their membership in things. Lodge members fell out in full regalia as did the veteran's organizations, and some men clearly had the problem of representing both affiliations. Oakes bumped into one citizen who wore the garb of an oriental potentate except for the cap, which was of the overseas variety and had the name of an old soldiers' club embroidered on it. In fact the only citizens consistently and austerely costumed, except for the police, were the Knight-Protectors of the Wood with their tall, pointed penitents' hoods and their dark red robes. Little Linda remarked that they looked like pencils, but something about them chilled Oakes so that the excitement which had been a warmth within him seemed to constrict and cool until nothing was left but that joyless feeling of rightness and inevitable forward motion.

The Grange band sounded a long, sepulchral fanfare and the crowd fell suddenly silent. There was the sound of a siren down one of the side streets, and the Knight-Protectors began urging the people back to clear the center of the square.

Then Oakes noticed and identified the smell of creosote, stronger and more pervading than surrounding sweat and beer-steam.

Then he saw the Stake with its surrounding bundles of kindling and small logs. It had been there all the time; he simply hadn't looked that way. The feeling of rightness was now a distinct physical thing like the touch of something cold in the small of the back, but still the feeling informed him only of itself and not of its meaning.

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When the Mayor's squad-car stopped at the edge of the square the crowd was so quiet that you could hear the driver pull up the emergency brake, and when the Mayor squeezed himself from the door of the car you could hear his joints pop and the fibers of his trousers strain against his body.

"This is the Mayor," Oakes heard himself say to Jerry, who stood very silently by. He could not have explained why he chose to make this unnecessary observation, but the need to instruct and point things out was upon him. That he should be talking when the rest of the town was so silent was also part of the Rightness.

"Notice his chain of office," Oakes observed, and Jerry looked very pained because several people had now turned around to look—not at the Mayor, nor even the grim Stake—but at his father. Still Oakes went on. One could only go *on*.

"The cylindrical object hanging from the chain of office is a steel capsule filled with explosive. Heat will detonate a cap set in the end of it."

Now all past anxiety, humiliation, deprivation and pain were apportioned ingredients, purposefully and not carelessly thrown into a huge bubbling cauldron, and within the cauldron something recognizable was taking form as the lines and masses of a picture emerge from a print in a bath of developer—recognizable and cohesive even if not meaningful: The Rightness, now pressing like a spear-point into the small of his back. No retreat now. No abdication.

The Mayor had lost some but not all of his flush of the day before. He staggered visibly, but it was merely a weakness of the knees; he held grimly to the invisible line between the car and the Stake. Four Knight-Protectors moved forward to assist him. A tall, gaunt man in a white robe also came forward and spoke to the Mayor. He was Marsh Griffith, an undertaker on ordinary days, today the Mayor's Chaplain. Griffith wore the gold tiara of his office, and above this metal band his bald head shone in a way that was more emphatic than ordinary baldness should have been. From the folds of his robe he drew an ivy wreath, and when he placed it on the Mayor's head there was a murmur from the crowd, low and heavy like the groaning of huge trees in a rising wind. The wreath settled over one of the Mayor's ears, but no one moved to straighten it. The Mayor shook his head and waved Griffith away with a limp gesture of his hand.

Little girls wearing starchy white dresses so short as to be little more than embellished bloomers, emerged from the crowd with baskets of flowers. They went about the work of strewing the flowers

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before the Mayor's feet and along the line of march with the prim efficiency of their kind, and while some were a little awkward, none showed any sign of timidity.

"This steel capsule," continued Oakes, paying no attention to his son, "is actually a powerful grenade. If the chain of office were left in place, the grenade would go off as the flames rose. It would cave in the victim's rib-cage like a berry basket and stop his heart instantly."

Jerry moved away from his father, but if Oakes saw him he did not care. He kept talking, and he knew that he sounded like an officious teacher whose memory he still despised. Mrs. Oakes clutched little Linda to her thigh and extended her arm towards Jerry, and Oakes ignored that too.

"The Mayor would die quite painlessly if someone prevented someone else from removing the chain of office before the torch was thrown. . . . ."

Young Jerry now stood beside his mother, but he watched his father steadily and with troubled eyes.

"But no one ever has."

Oakes then saw that people were watching him and shrinking from him. As though ushered by invisible sentries, they cleared a corridor in front of him, and there was no question in his mind but that he should pursue this corridor wherever it led. Ignoring the white faces on either side, he walked straight towards the Stake, against which the Mayor already stood with his paunch thrust out as importantly as ever. A Knight-Protector with a length of rope was pondering whether to pass the rope over, under or around the spherical mass. He finally wrapped the ropes over and then under the paunch, and the Mayor stood alone, legs buckling somewhat but held upright by his bonds.

Oakes could not have said whether the distance from the periphery of the square to the Stake itself was several paces or several miles. The Rightness was now in full charge and considerations of distance belonged to another time. One's hearing changed too. Oakes could hear birds singing at a great distance and the sound of a faint wind in the trees around the square, but he did not hear any sound from the people. They had become statues. It did not seem likely that they had ever been more than statues.

A Knight-Protector holding a blazing kerosene torch turned and looked at Oakes as he approached, then halted, then stood back respectfully.

When he stood before the fat man against the Stake he saw that tears ran down his cheeks, but the old contempt still needled through the tears and rheum. The Mayor looked smaller than he had before, but the contempt was sharper.

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Oakes felt it impinge against the Rightness like a stream of some cold fluid against a hot coal, but it was not enough to turn him back or even make him flinch.

"Take it Oakes," growled the Mayor through the phlegm in his throat. "You were born for it. Take it and to hell with you!"

Gently Oakes removed the chain of office from the neck of the fat man, and then he turned towards the assembled people and hung it around his own neck. It was remarkably heavy.

"The torch," said Oakes to the waiting executioner, and one of the bands struck up the May Song, which sounded like a blend of "The Old Oaken Bucket" and "Men of Harlech" with long, anguished embellishments from the brass section.

Oakes did not look back at the swiftly rising flames, but walked steadily through the corridor of silent citizens and Knight-Protectors towards the waiting police car. There was no screaming behind him, only a sound of gugug-gug-gug-gug, like the protests of a man in a dentist's chair.

"Have a good Seven Years" said someone in the crowd as he neared the waiting car. It was Al Morgan, his arm in a sling and his face half obscured with adhesive.

The little knot of people waiting around the car included his wife, Ethel and George Suggs from next door, his son Jerry, and Mr. Harper. They were all smiling weakly as he approached and their eyes were tired and unsurprised. There were quiet, diffident murmurs from a few people close to him—perfunctory congratulations and wishes for a good Seven Years, all addressed to "Your Honor", but most of the people were silent. The only sounds of real gaiety, in fact, came from little Linda, who was paying no attention to her father at all. She was jumping up and down in an effort to see the rising column of black smoke beyond the barrier of tall adult figures.

"Smells just like *meat,*" she squealed, and then giggled wildly as children do at such times.

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*By many, John W. Vandercook is thought of primarily as a news commentator. Over the years, he has also produced an impressive body of writing, both fiction and non-fiction. Much of it has had to do with the West Indies, and also with Africa. The latter is the setting of the following, which is both a reminder of attitudes and conditions that in part at least explain the present upheavals on the dark continent, and a chilling tale of the powers of love, and fear, and . . . what?*

# FUNK

## by John W. Vandercook

"MAGIC?" THE BANK MANAGER leaned back reflectively. "I don't know. Is it mood or medicine, as vague as a dream or as definite as an experiment in physics? You've only been in Africa a fortnight. It's your place to tell me."

"And you, how long?" I asked.

"How shall I reckon? Through two eruptions of the cone up there. Through rain enough to cover Europe twenty fathoms deep . . . Bless my soul, is it quinine or your foolish face? My conversation practically rhymes. If you really want to know, I've been on the Coast for eleven years and some days. 'How long, O Lord, how long!' "

" 'When found, make a note of.' "

"Huh?"

"Captain Cuttle, *Dombey and Son,* Charles Dickens," I explained.

"If you can read, what did you want to come down here for?"

"Just a social climber," I suggested. "But you're wandering. This magic business. I've heard some remarkable tales. What the deuce is it . . . funk, perhaps?"

"You mean the blacks are simply afraid? Possibly. A witch doctor has the awesome quality of any great tradition. But there's a hitch in that. A man who is afraid automatically resists. Fights back. He can't help it. But take my word for it, no one fights black magic, not in Africa . . . Could you stand a story?"

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"I can stand anything."

"Stout fella." The Bank Manager busied himself for a moment among the bottles on the table, then leaned back. He submerged happily for a moment, the blue eyes twinkled, and he went on.

"First place—let's have some atmosphere. That's important on the West Coast. All-important. Down here atmosphere, the thing writers and restaurant proprietors are always jabbering about, isn't just background. It's foreground. Usually it's the whole story. Look out the window there and shut up for a minute and you'll see what I mean."

"*I* shut up?" I began indignantly. But the Bank Manager had taken his own advice.

We had come for the week-end to a "bush-house" halfway up the mountain, ostensibly to shoot some leopard by the moon—if we should feel energetic. Eight miles up the road was a John Holt factory and eleven miles down the same road one came to the port. In between, except for one or two native settlements, there was nothing.

The window behind my chair was small and high, fringed at the top with a black, ragged line where the thatch hung down. Outside, a tall oil palm cut its stately silhouette against the night sky. There was no wind, yet its dry fronds whispered livingly. Ghostly snakes of vine hung down from it. That was all, but over us and over everything hung the throbbing, breathing silence of the tropic night. Somewhere behind the house a branch snapped. A sausage fly flung itself against the lantern and fell to the floor.

"Africa," said the Bank Manager, "is the only continent I know where the sense of vastness is inescapable. Even the air seems ancient sometimes—as if the old monsters of the swamps had breathed it first and sort of got the savor out of it.

"But this is Cameroons. We aren't in it. Do you know the Benin River country in Southern Nigeria? Because if you don't, my dear fellow, you're in luck . . .

"We had a branch bank up there about five years ago at a place called Bulambo. There was my assistant and myself, the Assistant District Commissioner, and an old timer at the Hatton and Cookson factory. We four whites and about a hundred swamp natives were the population. There were three European houses, some tin sheds on the beach and the native town. A cheery hole. Exhilarating, if you understand me. If a chap had a passion for canoeing, there were about fifteen thousand miles of connected creeks and rivers—the whole Niger Delta—at his disposal. But there wasn't any walking. Bulambo occupies about ten acres of fairly dry land. Around it is nothing but the river and miles upon miles of mangrove swamp,

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mud, water, snakes and roots. And hot! Hell is a winter resort in comparison. Sticky, steamy heat with nary a breeze.

"Naturally we whites had a good dose of each other's society. And our contact with the natives was much closer than is usual. Couldn't help but be. I mean, when the Bulambo brought out their drums and danced they did it fifty yards from our windows. When their people died we could hear the women singing. We knew them all by sight and many by name—the chief and his wives, the witch doctor, Sokinoma, he was called . . . all of 'em.

"There, ordinarily, the intimacy stopped. The A.D.C., in fact, was considerably annoyed at having the beggars jammed up under his chin, felt it wasn't altogether consistent with his official dignity. He had a vague notion it would be politer if they moved into the marsh somewhere—waist-deep in mud, I suppose.

"I didn't care. I don't fancy the African particularly, so I've developed a blindness. I wouldn't know there was a black man in sight if I was reviewing the Nigerian Rifles. What Shaw, the Hatton and Cookson man, felt on any subject I don't know. Or care.

"But my assistant—he was a nice thin young fellow with black hair and eyes that made me feel like his mother every time I looked at them—was absolutely tickled.

"The night he arrived—a Dutch freighter cruising the rivers for logs and palm oil put him down in the front yard—there was a jamboree of some kind; two men with tom-toms, two with palm-fiber harps, the women swaying in a line chanting, the young bucks dancing in the firelight. You know the sort of thing. Civilization checked with the pile of pants outside.

"Well, Croker—that was his name, by the way, Jimmy Croker—absolutely loved it. We were sitting on the verandah slapping mosquitoes and this business was going on just across the yard.

" 'This is gorgeous,' says he. 'This is perfectly marvelous. Don't know as I'll be able to spare much time for your silly bank. Why, there are no barriers at all. I'll have the time of my life.'

" 'You make me very happy, darling,' says I. 'You'll find that barriers is just one of about twelve thousand things Bulambo hasn't got. That's why we love it so.'

"But I couldn't put him off. It seems that all through school anthropology had been a kind of hobby of his. He'd read Spencer and Tylor and Boas and Westermarck and the rest of the big men and even that hadn't discouraged him. That was one reason he'd tried for a West African job. The blacks and the browns and the yellows, he told me frankly, had his respect far more than the whites. He wasn't especially im-

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pressed with a civilization that could find nothing better to do than hide in ditches for four years and bean itself with shrapnel.

"The next afternoon, as soon as we shut up shop he put on his nice new sun-helmet and was off. A few minutes later I looked out the window and there he was, sitting on a low stool in front of Chief Bulambo's hut, his helmet on his knees and the chief's three weeks' old baby in the hat. Old Bulambo was sitting beside him and some women were standing around and all of them were jawing away like a family reunion. I was rather pleased. It would keep the kid out of trouble, I fancied. There are lots worse vices than anthropology to gobble up a youngster on his first tour down here. And in a small place like Bulambo the 'losing caste' thing didn't matter, in spite of the way the A.D.C. cried into his whiskey about it.

"Every day he followed the same program. After he was finished with his work—and Croker was the best assistant I ever had, I might mention—he'd pop across the yard and fraternize for all he was worth. His ambition was to learn the language and, with that as a key, enter into their ways of thinking, their legends, magic and the rest.

"Pretty soon he began to pick up a few words, in three months he was adept. He knew every man, woman and child by name. And at last he got pally with the really big man—the witch doctor Sokinoma, a dried-up, wise-looking old chap whom we rarely saw.

"At night sometimes he'd come into my room, sit on the edge of the bed and give me a yarn . . . He told me how a white rag hung from the end of a bending pole moves in the starlight and sets a tune for the pale swamp ghosts to dance to; how when a black mother loses her first-born she can mend her heart with a mess of blood and dirt that sets the cycle going round again—a life back to the land-mother it came from. Why it was, in terms of their philosophy, that Sokinoma could reach into the grass and pick up a six-foot hooded cobra as casually as you'd handle so much rope.

"He was making extraordinary progress. He had begun a Bulambo dictionary, a thing no one had ever attempted. I began to catch a queer, rapt, religious look on his face sometimes . . . And I began to notice something else." The Bank Manager broke off.

"Look here." His eyes roamed the matting covered walls. He pointed to a huge house-spider that sprawled at the edge of the glow of lantern light. "Spiders, giant cockroaches, lizards in bed with you . . . that sort of business. Do they get on your nerves?"

I shook my head. "No. I can't say they do. They gave me the jumps a bit the first few days, but

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then I fitted them into the landscape. I don't mind them now."

"Put the sugar in your tea, wait a minute till the ants come up, bail 'em out and carry on?"

"Exactly."

"Croker had the same experience. Jibbed at the fauna for about forty-eight hours, then forgot it. But he changed again.

"He started being careful about tucking in his net. Then I noticed he always shook out his pajamas and hit his slippers on the floor before he put them on. It would have been trivial, sound sense, in fact, if he had known he was doing it. But he didn't. He gave me the curious impression that he was being ridden—ridden by subconscious fear. Invisible Africa was getting on his nerves. He'd gone in too deep."

"What do you mean?"

"He'd 'gone native' spiritually. It's an intangible thing and hard to explain. But any old Coaster would understand me. There are qualities and kinds of fear. A big black Bulambo with his hair in plaits, tattoed ridges all over his face and chest, and a fish-spear and handkerchief by way of costume is, for example, superficially fearless. He's no more afraid of the Governor of Nigeria than, er . . . the Governor's wife and he'll charge a machine gun as quick as wink. But watch that same man about his daily business. Watch him avoid a certain stone, carefully twist off a cocoanut so as not to hurt the branch, do anything rather than pass a certain point. Why? Simply because he believes that not seeing a thing does not argue that it does not exist, that the world is thronged with dangerous forces, and that nothing animate or inanimate is devoid of life.

"Croker gave me exactly the same impression. Then he absolutely proved it.

"One afternoon he was fiddling with some papers on my desk, looking for something. I heard him suck in his breath in a curious, frightened way, and looked up.

"He had a blue print in his hand and was as white as a sheet. 'What the devil's this?" he asked.

"I took the paper from him and looked at it. It was a plan of the Bank's Bulambo property with the place marked on it where we were going to build a new vault. I didn't savvy at all. Croker knew as much as I did, I thought, about the new vault. Anyway, I saw nothing to get excited about . . . By the way, I wonder if you know the sort of vault we build down here?"

"No."

"It's simply a small steel frame shed roofed and sided with corrugated iron and fitted with a strong door, usually built in the back yard of a Bank property. In a place like Bulambo, where the Bank handles the government tax money and where there is con-

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tinual trade with natives who bring in kernels and palm oil, one naturally keeps a great deal of small coin on hand, shillings and sixpences and threepenny bits—paper not being current. And its bulk is out of all proportion. Therefore the vault—just a place to keep the spare currency boxes.

"But to get back to Croker. I asked him what the devil was up?

"He pointed to the plan. 'I didn't realize you were going to stick the vault just there,' he said. 'Because you can't.'

"He turned his back to me, walked over to the window and began to explain before I had a chance to say anything. 'Look at the plan,' he said. 'You notice that the vault is marked to go at the back of the property just at the edge of the swamp? Yes? Have you ever noticed there is a trail through the grass back there?' He turned to face me.

"I nodded. 'I have,' I said. 'I've often wondered where the deuce it led and who used it.'

"Croker looked straight at me. 'It begins behind Sokinoma's house and leads into the swamp. And no one uses it except Sokinoma, the King Crocodile and the Bulambo dead.'

"At that I jumped up as if some one had fired a gun at me. 'What the hell are you talking about?' I shouted.

"Croker laughed—if you could conscientiously call it a laugh. 'Of course,' he said, 'as to the dead using it, I have only the word of the natives for that. It's their belief, I should say. But when it comes to Sokinoma and the King Croc using it—why, I've seen them a dozen times.'

"He waited for me to say something, but I hadn't the wind. He went on.

"'Every morning at sun-up Sokinoma comes down the path from his hut carrying a basket of meat and fish—stuff contributed by everyone in town. At the same moment a big crocodile—an enormous creature fully sixteen feet long—comes out of the mud at the other end and crawls up the trail. Fact. About halfway Sokinoma tosses his stuff to the crocodile, then it turns around and goes back. The halfway point is marked by a little arch of palm leaves. And just there, old chap, is where you've marked the site of your precious vault. You see my point. What's infinitely more important than the crocodile feeding is that Sokinoma does not take his offering down the trail when a Bulambo dies. The mornings following a death all stay indoors and sing—you've heard them many times—and they think the soul of the dead person takes Sokinoma's place, goes down the path and is consumed by the croc. Becomes part of its soul, you know, and returns to the swamp. That's a very common belief. The crocodile feeding

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scene is commonplace all up and down the coast.'

"Can you beat that? I thought I'd never get my mouth shut. There was Croker explaining the maddest stuff I'd ever heard with hardly more emotion than a schoolteacher explaining algebra to the boy defective. I suppose I looked impressed. Jimmy grinned at me. 'Get up early tomorrow and I'll show you.'

"I said something clever like 'My eye!'

"Croker went back to his desk. 'So help me. I'd have told you long ago if I thought you'd be interested —or if Sokinoma wasn't so afraid that if it got out we'd turn the show into a sort of circus . . . But that vault is no go.'

"That's all we said just then. But sure enough, next morning Croker stirred me up when it was still dark and we went to a top floor window. He gave me a pair of field glasses."

The Bank Manager paused, produced a cigarette from his shirt pocket and tapped it emphatically on the table.

"You don't have to believe me, but I swear to you I saw just what Croker had described. Sokinoma came with his basket and stopped midway. A tremendous big crocodile sprawled and slithered itself out of the water and up the path . . . took the food and went away again. Just that. Since then I've looked up the thing in books and it seems to be generally known all up and down the coast. According to the experts, the crocodile fetish tribes all make a daily offering of food and one or more crocodiles soon learn the time and place, and form the habit of coming. But believe me, that old black man and that damned lizard in the pale grass with the daybreak mists hanging round them made a picture.

"I came out of a kind of daze to hear Croker's voice. 'About the vault, now,' he said. 'You realize, of course, you've got to move it?"

"I looked at him. He meant it. Lord how he meant it. All my little indistinct worries about him came to a head. I did some quick thinking and decided:

"'Look here, Croker,' I said. 'The materials for that vault are at Lagos now. Within a few days the construction man will be here with them. He decided on its location, not I. It's the logical place for the thing. There, I think, it will go.' I took his arm. 'I don't care a hang about the vault, but I do about you. Take my advice. Drop this sort of thing and drop it quick. It's not a white man's game. Drink more, think less and put Africa away from you. It's a big trap and you'll be small game for it.'

"He nodded, said something about 'very well, of course I was the boss,' and left me.

"I thought about it then and later. I kept to my opinion that to

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go ahead would lay the invisible ghosts for him."

The Bank Manager wiped his face with a large, already moist handkerchief, and continued.

"At the end of the week, the *Benin,* an Elder Dempster local boat, put in, unloaded the materials for the vault and landed two passengers—the Lagos construction man and a girl, Betty Shaw, daughter of old Shaw, the Hatton and Cookson manager.

"She was a surprise. Her existence, even. I haven't said much about Shaw for the reason there isn't much to say. He was a first-rate African trader verging a little on the palm-oil ruffian type. He drank like a fish and showed it no more, and kept a tight mouth. The girl herself was the first announcement of her coming.

"Croker and I were on the quay receiving the builder and getting the boxes off and old Shaw introduced us as soon as she was down the ladder. Said she was finished with school and had 'come down to keep her old father company.' In Bulambo, the poor ass!

"She had red-gold bobbed hair, a turned-up nose and marvelous eyes. She was wearing white, had a red Haussa-leather bag in her hand, and not a trouble in the world. She was as pretty as a magazine cover—and as common. Cruel and stupid and vain and unimaginative, all the commonplace faults. That was the way I sized her up. It took me about two minutes. But I'm an old-timer. In the same two minutes, Jimmy Croker, with brains and breeding enough for three men, fell dazed in love.

"We seemed fated to have differences of opinion. But I was middle-aged and full of quinine and he was twenty-four and hadn't seen a white woman in six months. And, I admit it, Betty Shaw was pretty—pretty as a paper rose. I nearly burst that night trying to get to tell him what a fool he was. But I'd said say enough for then.

"They began seeing each other. She had nothing to do and he was the only presentable white male. One afternoon he took her out in a native canoe. It was a beauty, one of the most exquisitely carved things I've ever seen, delicate and graceful as a bird. She called it 'quaint' and laughed at it. It wasn't nice neat green canvas and shiny varnish, so it was merely funny. Croker laughed with her, in an obliging, half-hearted way.

"Pretty soon Shaw had us over to dinner. All of us, the Lagos fellow and the A.D.C. included. A bad hour, that. We adults exhausted the chatty possibilities of the kernel trade in about five minutes and then it was up to Croker and Betty to keep things going. Which they did not.

"After dinner we all went out on the verandah and simply sat there brooding over our gins. Then Betty

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Shaw stretched back in her chair, stuck her legs out so her skirts slid halfway up her bare thighs and remarked. 'Caesar, how *can* you go it? All the desert island yarns are simply blithering. Does anything *ever* happen here?"

"'At least the desert island is inhabited.' Croker said.

"She made a mock bow. 'I didn't refer to present company.'

"'Neither did I. I meant the natives.'

"She smiled. 'Dear me, I *did* forget the poor heathen. But just what do they contribute to Bulambo night life?'

"That was all Croker needed. He talked for half an hour. We men were all ears. Any knowledge we fancied we had of the country seemed childish when he told us what he knew. Fascinating stuff, unquestionably. But the girl smoked cigarettes and smiled at him.

"He must have felt he wasn't making the impression with her he'd hoped, so to my surprise he topped off with the crocodile yarn. He told first of the legend that the lonely dead go down the trail at dawn to become part of the crocodile—to them the great spirit of the marshland that they love. Then he detailed the scene I'd witnessed.

"She was attentive, all right. 'Do you mean to say this goes on every morning?'

"'Yes. If you like, I think I could arrange for you to watch. Would you care to?'

"At that she burst out laughing. To me it was like rubbing a knife-edge sideways on a plate. She positively crowed. 'Would I just? Rather! See the funny nigger feed the tame crocodile? Sixpence, ladies and gents, and worth every farthing! For tuppence more can I see a bit of ghost gobbling? I beg Bulambo's pardon. It's a perfect Wembley. Tomorrow, then?'

"'Perhaps not tomorrow,' Croker said. That was all and pretty soon we pushed along home.

* * *

"I realized that one of two things would happen. Either that scene would make him see what a fool she was or, for calf-love's sake, he'd switch to her view and let the magic business go hang. I couldn't for the life of me make up my mind which I'd prefer. He didn't show his cards until the following afternoon.

"We were in the office and the Lagos fellow barged in and began to grouse about not being able to get any labor. He had his boxes open and every piece of stuff was numbered, but he'd found out that not a soul in town would have anything to do with him for any price.

"I'd rather expected something of the sort, but still I had no suggestions. I looked over to Croker's desk. He was working away with

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his lips set, looking sort of pale and worried. I didn't think he'd heard us.

" 'Jimmy, old man,' I began, but he swung round and started talking before I'd gone any further.

" 'You can change the site of the bloody thing. Put it twenty paces nearer the house, get a drier location and one easier to keep under observation—and not stir up a hornet's nest, which is incidentally a needless and stupid cruelty to a whole townful of people . . . You can either do that . . .'

"Then I broke in with some sort of noise intended to convey doubt. After all, the silly vault didn't have to be just there. But Croker interrupted me.

" 'Or,' he said, accenting the 'or,' *'or* you can take my canoe, go fifteen minutes' paddle up the creek to Bafang and get all the labor you need. The Bafang don't belong to the crocodile totem and they would welcome a chance to do the Bulambo a bad turn. What's more, I happen to know the chief's son is a trained carpenter . . . And in either case you can both damn well go to hell.'

"He turned back to the desk. I knew the girl had won.

"For upwards of a month there were no developments. The vault was finished and we moved in the currency boxes. We got a night watchman to come over evenings from Bafang.

"Sokinoma and his crowd made extraordinarily little fuss. A delegation of them called on the A.D.C. but they were frightened and their English was practically non-existent. So the Commissioner, not having the foggiest notion what it was all about, threw them out. Except that not one of them would go near the vault, that the whole town seemed to be wearing long faces, and that there was an unusual lot of doleful singing at night, there was no evidence that anything out of the way had occurred.

"The African is the most easily licked of human creatures—*on the surface.*

"Croker seemed to have lost interest in them. It was rarely now that he went over to the native side to have a chin chin with his old pals. In their unaccusing fashion I believe they held him responsible for what amounted to a desecration of an altar, what to them appeared the greatest calamity in remembered history. Sokinoma cut him dead. In fact, the old man was rarely visible. He stayed indoors all the time. Croker practically quit working on his notes, on the book that was to be the fulfillment of the enthusiasm of his short lifetime. And when he did work on it he made excuses to his girl—damn her red head.

"It was March and the rainy season had begun. You know—clear days, and nights that would make Noah nervous. I used to

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wake up at night being sympathetic for the poor Bafang watchman standing out in all that wet. He had built himself a little shelter of palm branches, but in rain like that it was useless.

"Then one evening he turned up sick. I saw him staggering out of his canoe, yelled for my boy and had a bed made up for him on the back verandah. He had pneumonia, obviously. Croker popped over to get Sokinoma to have a look at him—the old man was the leading doctor of Bulambo, of course, but Sokinoma turned him down flat. The vault, of course. By taking the watchman job the Bafang had put himself outside the pale, you understand.

"He checked out that night, poor chap. Absolutely like snuffing out a candle . . . And generally the Delta people can stand anything in the way of wetting. They're acclimated.

"Next day I paddled over to Bafang to hire a successor. No one seemed too keen on the job, but I raised the pay a bit, promised to build a tin shelter to make things more comfortable, and finally signed on one of the chief's younger sons. He was a fine big chap who wore nothing but a loin cloth, carried a carved paddle around with him all the time and had a rarely enthusiastic dislike for everyone in Bulambo. He seemed all right. There was no real point in having a watchman anyway, but the London office insisted."

The Bank Manager eyed the acetylene lamp. "The silly thing's going out, isn't it?" he remarked.

I observed it long enough to be able to add my expert opinion that the silly thing *was* out.

"Damn," said the Bank Manager. "I'd better push along. The moon there will do to turn in by, won't it? Filling acetylene lamps is no fit occupation for the white race."

The moon was streaming directly in the window. The shadow of the ragged roof thatch drew grotesque, ghastly lines on my friend's face. He recommenced abruptly.

"A week later, about midnight, I heard the most frightful scream. Woke me up and addled my nerves so that I couldn't stir for a moment. I was just shakily getting my slippers on when Croker came in, said 'Something's up,' and grabbed an electric flash lamp. I got my shotgun and we went out on the back porch. It was a clear night with stars. And still! We could hear each other breathing.

"'Ndita! Ndita!" Croker called. That was the watchman's name. The scream, we thought, had come from somewhere near the vault.

"No answer. A big night bird flew high overhead somewhere, zrumming its wings. Everything absolutely still, peaceful.

"'We'd better go down and have a look,' Croker said.

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"We went slowly, turning the lamp in all directions and at intervals called Ndita. No answer. We went right up to the door of the vault, getting our feet and pajama legs in the deuce of a mess from the wet grass. No sign of anything. Then we cruised back to the house, feeling a bit shaky. There seemed nothing we could do.

"With daylight the whole thing became clear. It was all patterned on the ground. That crocodile, of course. Queer we'd never thought of it. We could see where the thing had crawled out of the swamp and up to the door of the vault where the watchman sat, most probably asleep. It had evidently taken one bite, knocking that one awful scream out of the man, then slithered back, dragging him under water in the marsh. They won't eat live meat, you know . . . It was all printed there in the mud. It gave us the creeps. Under the circumstances! After all, though, the place where the watchman sat was the crocodile's habitual feeding place. One could argue it was a natural death just as much as was the death of his predecessor. Damn near anything is a natural death in Africa except dying of old age.

"Croker said nothing. Not a single 'I told you so.' He was in love.

"On the surface he neither feared nor believed in magic any more. *On the surface* he'd adopted Betty Shaw's reasoning about such things. It was perfectly simple. Africans were niggers. That was that. Beneath contempt even, much less credence. A not unfamiliar point of view, you know.

* * *

"Of course there was nothing doing at Bafang for any more watchmen. Two even slightly related accidents is all you need on the Niger Delta to start a new religion. That vault was haunted by the spirits of the cheated dead—that's all there was to it. There was no use talking.

"I sent up to our Sapele branch for them to send down a man who spoke no Bulambo and as little English as possible.

"He came two days later. I arranged with our cook to find a place for him to bunk in the tool shed under the house and that same evening he started work.

"I was as fair with him as I dared be. I told him about the croc, and to prevent the same thing happening again I gave him my gun and a big gasoline lantern to keep going. I also took the chair away from him to prevent his falling asleep.

"Nevertheless, I was anxious. The business had got on my nerves far more than I cared to admit. Sokinoma and his crowd had, it seemed to me, been entirely too quiet. Seemed too completely detached from what was going on to

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be really convincing. And I thought I'd caught a queer new note in their singing—a speeded-up, clamorous, almost gay quality. Several times in the course of the night I got up and went to look out the window. But the watchman's light was burning and I could see him standing on duty by the door.

"Croker's voice pulled me out of bed next morning. He was in his room next to mine leaning out of the window shouting at the watchman. He called several times, then shut up and came in to me.

" 'Look here,' he said. 'that new man is still on the job and doesn't answer when I yell at him. I can't make it out. Get up.'

"I put some shoes on and we went downstairs together. It was still early and the house boys weren't yet around.

"We could see the watchman from the verandah, apparently, as Croker had said, still on duty. We walked quickly down the path toward him. He was stone dead. He was standing bolt upright, his back against the vault door. My gun, its stock on the ground, was held in his hand. And on his black face was the most frightful expression of pure terror I have ever seen. The eyes were wide open, the lips slightly apart, the nostrils dilated. Killed in an instant of unbelievable, dreadful fear.

"Croker grabbed my arm.

" 'My God, look!' he said. He pointed down. There in the earth, soggy from the fall of dew, was the print of the body of a huge crocodile, the arc of the tail, the deep depression from its belly, the four prints of its clawlike feet, the wedgelike mark of its head. *But there were no traces anywhere of its departure or approach.* Simply, though the ground was everywhere soft, that isolated, uncanny spoor at the dead man's feet.

"I went over at once and got the A.D.C. and the three of us looked over the ground together. We were not mistaken. We examined that ground as if our lives depended on it. We were scared. I confess it. I could hardly seem to get my breath. Th A.D.C. was so white I thought he was going to faint. But there was nothing. The dead man and the great sprawling, frightful mark. That was all.

"The Commissioner walked over to the native quarter to have a look round while Croker and I got the body into the house. He came back in a few minutes to say that not a soul in Bulambo, though it was now long after daylight, was abroad. They knew!

"We sat down to talk it over. There was, as far as we could see, nothing on earth to be done. The A.D.C. couldn't arrest the townspeople on a charge of corporate oversleeping. Yet that was the only sign they'd given.

"We had breakfast with the Shaws. Our servants and the Com-

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missioner's, we discovered, had skipped. Simply vanished. None of them happened to be Bulambo boys and they'd lit out. We wondered how they'd come to know the latest development before we did. But there was no use wondering. We were hungry. On leaving the house we noticed the crocodile mark had been deliberately stamped out by bare footprints. One or several Bulambos had slipped out while we were in the house and trod up the neighborhood so there was nothing left.

"Shaw's boys were still on the job and he told us to come on in. He, I suppose, was so outside of the thing that his servants weren't afraid to stay, though to judge by their expressions while they gave us breakfast they weren't going to stick much longer.

"It was an intensely serious business. Shaw was furious. Said that unless something was done quickly the natives of the district would quit bringing in produce and Bulambo would simply vanish from the map. A sort of general strike, you know. We couldn't for the life of us figure how, but the deaths of the three watchmen were certainly connected. Sokinoma and the powers of magic had declared open war. I say magic now and I said magic then simply because I know no other term that covers the facts —or the hopeless lack of facts.

"Betty Shaw, of course, was present at that breakfast. She listened politely until each one of us had had his say, then she took her turn. It was like a cold shower bath.

"She lit a cigarette and leaned back smiling in that devilish self-assured way. 'You're making yourselves ridiculous,' she told us. 'Four grown men tiptoeing around with their fingers crossed as if they actually swallowed ha'penny nigger nonsense. Be logical. A man dies of pneumonia. Well, why shouldn't he, in this climate? Then a crocodile slips out and drags away Number Two. Why not, again? It's the nature of the beast, isn't it? What do you think crocodiles live on, olives? And then the local crowd get it into their thick heads that if they can top off two coincidences with a third they will produce a tremendous effect. So what do they do?'

"The A.D.C. snorted. 'That's just what I'd like to know!'

"Betty just looked pert. 'Well, how's this for an explanation? Just offhand, of course. Why do you think the crocodile mark was destroyed the minute your back was turned? Perhaps to prevent your having a second look at it by broad daylight? Suppose, just for the sake of argument, it was merely a clever bit of sculpture done by a man who carefully obliterated his own tracks when he had finished and backed away? That would cover the thing, wouldn't it?'

"'My dear child,' said the A.D.C. 'the man was dead.'

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"Betty waved her hand airily. Nothing could trouble that red head.

"'Nothing easier,' she explained. 'A witch doctor in the correct costume jumping out of the dark would scare anyone to death, wouldn't he?'

"We were silent. There might have been a little, a very little in what she said. We were desperate for an explanation, anyway.

"Croker was impressed. I imagine it was the most constructive job of thinking he'd ever heard her perform. He was absolutely soft-eyed with admiration. He leaned forward. 'But what shall we do?'

"She reached across the corner of the table and patted his hand. 'Do the regular thing, of course.'

"'What?'

"She smiled again. '*Lay* the ghost! After all, what is this except the old haunted house yarn all over again? Let Jimmy here in the rôle of the young hero spend the night in the vault. He can take plenty of cigarettes with him. I say inside the vault because there won't be danger from anything but ghosts—which, after all, is what we want to lay. And I hardly think ghosts will bother Jimmy. What do you think?'

"'As for me,' I said. 'I'm against it completely. It's perfect nonsense.'

"The girl turned to me. She was angry. 'You may think he'd be afraid, but I don't,' she said.

"Damn her, do you see? She had him. I saw through her at once. Simply the fool girl feeding her own cursed vanity by making her lover do some brave thing. She was bored and this was her way of amusing herself. Jimmy Croker, though, didn't realize. He couldn't take his eyes off her face. He nodded.

"To my disgust the A.D.C. agreed. Quoted instances from his experience where a white man had showed up some native myth or other and ended it on the spot . . . The poor beggars have a tremendous respect for us, you know.

"That afternoon I had a talk with Croker. He was frank enough with me. Told me he didn't favor the idea particularly, that he was frankly nervous. Especially since he'd been against that cursed vault from the beginning. But it seemed he had asked Betty Shaw to marry him and that she hadn't given him her answer yet. So naturally he didn't dare back out. He would look the coward and it might be all up with him then. He said he'd figured a way to keep himself occupied during the night, to keep his nerves from getting *too* badly frayed there in the dark. He was going to take a hammer and nail down the lids of some currency boxes that we were going to ship down-river the next day. It would be something to do, and if he made a botch of it, then no matter. You

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know how it is when you're alone in the dark—if you can find a piece of string and make cats cradles—anything of that sort, it keeps you from getting fidgety.

"About nine o'clock in the evening we all walked over to the native town and the A.D.C. made a speech. Called them all sort of names for being silly and superstitious and told them how Jimmy was going to show them the vault was the safest place in Nigeria. They listened carefully enough, but I couldn't tell whether they were impressed or not. I noticed old Sokinoma on the outskirts of the crowd. He had a queer, vicious little smile on his face . . . Jimmy, remember, was the one white man his tribe had ever trusted and he, it seemed, was mocking them worst of all. Croker felt it, I think, and it must have hurt. But with that girl beside him with her hand in his, nothing else in the world mattered.

"We made the thing as ceremonious as possible. Escorted Jimmy in great state over to the vault and ushered him in. Betty spoiled the dramatic timing just a trifle by remembering he didn't have his overcoat and running up to his room to get it. One really does need a coat down here in the rainy season. It gets chilly at night. I liked her little show of decent female tenderness.

"He gave us a half-hearted grin and went inside. I three-quarters closed the door on him. We stood around a few minutes, not exactly knowing what to do next and then we said good night and left. I climbed the steps of the back porch and stood there in the shadows watching. The crowd of natives hadn't entirely dispersed yet and I didn't want any monkey business to take place right under my nose. It was a windy night and raveled rain clouds scudded through the sky. But a bright half-moon hung above the swamps and I could see pretty clearly. Gradually the group of natives thinned. In the vague light it was like the slow disintegration of a shadow. There wasn't a sound of a whisper or the rustle of a blade of grass. They were impressed, all right. It occurred to me maybe the Commissioner was right—that if all went well they'd really be convinced. In a few minutes only one was left—Sokinoma. The silhouette of his weedy, skinny little body was unmistakable. He stood perfectly quiet, facing the vault door, perhaps a dozen paces away from it. I watched him as I would a snake. Then a queer thing happened.

"He drew himself together and with a curious rhythm began to lift his arms over his head. I've never seen quite the same gesture. Ordinarily, you know, when a man lifts his arms they fan out. Sokinoma's didn't. They crept up along his sides like snakes, then seemed

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to grow into the air—a weird, commanding, ghostly gesture. I had the delusion he had grown immensely tall. I was just going to shout at him when a denser cloud obscured the moon and everything was blotted out. The wind carried the cloud past in what seemed no more than a fraction of a second and then the light streamed out. That old magician had vanished. I suppose I was upset and credulous, but I swear it seemed to me he had leapt away into the sky. A trick of the light, of course. But his shadow, when that cloud came, had appeared to attenuate and dart in an arc of blackness up and away across the marsh."

The Bank Manager replenished his glass. "Of course, in actual fact, I suppose he'd merely taken advantage of the momentary darkness and made a break. Done it for effect, you know. But it didn't make me any easier in my mind, believe me.

"I hung around for a little then went to bed. I got a book and read. That is, I turned the pages at decent intervals. I never will know *what* I read. I only knew sleep was out of the question. After perhaps an hour I couldn't stand it any longer and got up and put on mosquito boots over my pajama legs and went out.

"From the porch I could hear the sound of his intermittent hammering and knew he was all right. Poor kid, toiling away on those currency boxes by the touch system—fighting phantoms with a hammer and a box of nails . . .

"I had sense enough, at least, not to walk near the vault. The sound of my tiptoeing around in the grass would have given him the horrors. But I walked every where else. First, I made a cruise of the native end. Not a soul about. The crazy little shacks were all boarded up tight. A heavy mist was rising from the ground so I seemed to walk in cloud. And the grotesque shadows of the huts playing on it, made the whole scene seem like a madman's dream. I found Sokinoma's hut and stuck my head in the door. He wasn't there. There was no sound except the rushing of the wind among the treetops and the far-away plaintive calling of a bird. The clouds were thickening and running fast.

"I walked along the waterfront toward the other end. I looked up at Shaw's house and saw a light in one of the windows. I happened to know it was Betty's room. I don't know why, but it cheered me up no end. Evidently she couldn't sleep either. At least poor Jimmy's luck had two guardians that night.

"I hung around for a little, then realized it was growing black dark. A great flash of lightning made everything blaze blue-white, the next second there was an immense boom of thunder and the rain came. Glory, did it come! Like a

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waterfall under pressure. I had quite a time making the house—arrived at last looking like a cat found in one of those Roman galleys in the Thames mud.

"I rubbed down and got into clean things and went to bed. The last thing I remember was the roaring and the booming of the rain on the tin roof and the sound of its lashing on the river."

The Bank Manager rose from his chair and walked to the door of the hut. After a pause he went on. His back was turned to me.

"I woke up with a start and realized it was daybreak. I knew something had wakened me and the next instant I knew what. The Bulambo were singing, and I recognized their song. It was the one Jimmy had made me know—the one they sang of a morning when one of their people die—the accompaniment they supplied when a spirit walked the last time down the Crocodile trail . . ."

The Bank Manager gave a snorting, uneasy laugh. "I've never moved so quickly in my life. Didn't even put on slippers. Just pelted down the stairs and out to the vault and jerked the door open." He turned, came back and leaned his hands on the table. "They'd got him." He drew in his breath.

"He was half standing, half sitting, leaned back against a pile of boxes. The hammer was gripped in his hand as if he'd fought with it. His dead face was gray, contorted with appalling horror. His eyes were starting, his lips snarled back over his teeth. He'd seen ghosts, I tell you—shapes that had devoured his mind with the tearing, savage fury of lion's claws in meat. I'll never forget so long as I may live . . . A human sacrifice, to nameless, fearful things . . . poor Jimmy."

"So you do believe in it?" I hesitated. "There was no other explanation?"

He sprawled into his chair. "Not altogether . . . perhaps. And there was an explanation . . . of a sort.

"We found it when we lifted him. The tail of his overcoat was nailed to a currency box. He'd been sitting on the box nailing on the lid and in the dark had hammered down his coat. When he tried to move he was jerked back. He struggled but something in the blackness held him fast and yanked him down. An invisible hand. His heart stopped." The Bank Manager's voice dropped almost to a whisper. "But how, in heaven's name, can the witchmen seem to *know?*"

"What did the girl say?" I asked him.

"She?" The Bank Manager hesitated. "She said what you did. 'Funk.' I don't know. Possibly you're right. I've been here eleven years, I tell you. *I* don't know. Not any more." He got up.

"Let's turn in."

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## Danse Macabre

Carol came prandancin out of her marvelaut, looked completely mystified at her pet oarfish, and asked, "What the hell are you doing *here*?"

He tried to look baleful in answer, but mostly was too busy flip-flopping on the flagstones, trying to get back to the water. It was an awful spot for an oarfish and he knew it. So did she.

Helpfully, Carol started kicking him along the path towards the pond. But she stopped just short. And rependanced when she saw that her foot had bashed in his ribs.

She was sorry; Too late;
she empathized. he died
and silently oozed away.

Hot tearfully, quite empty inside, she sadanced her way back to the marvelaut

where she thought for a long long time . . .
Then she cut off the offending foot
and spread out the kicking toes
in the shape of an oarfish
with *three* baleful eyes
and turned it, quite
loose.

After which she felt much relieved. Indeed, almost happy. Once again she was Carol in her marvelaut, and all was well with her world. Except for one small thing.

As Carol came prandancin out of her marvelaut, she looked completely mystified at her pet oarfish, and asked, "What the hell are you doing *here*?"

—Robert Choly

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*Keith Laumer has spent some time abroad in the service of our government—which may or may not have suggested to him the idea for this account of a superb fighting unit of the future, stranded on a planet far from home.*

# COMBAT UNIT

*by Keith Laumer*

I DO NOT LIKE IT; IT has the appearance of a trap, but the order has been given. I enter the room and the valve closes behind me.

I inspect my surroundings. I am in a chamber 40.81 meters long, 10.35 meters wide, 4.12 high, with no openings except the one through which I entered. It is floored and walled with five-centimeter armor of flint-steel and beyond that there are ten centimeters of lead. Massive apparatus is folded and coiled in mountings around the room. Power is flowing in heavy buss bars beyond the shielding. I am sluggish for want of power; my examination of the room has taken .8 seconds.

Now I detect movement in a heavy jointed arm mounted above me. It begins to rotate, unfold. I assume that I will be attacked, and decide to file a situation report. I have difficulty in concentrating my attention . . .

I pull back receptivity from my external sensing circuits, set my bearing locks and switch over to my introspection complex. All is dark and hazy. I seem to remember when it was like a great cavern glittering with bright lines of transvisual colors . . .

It is different now; I grope my way in gloom, feeling along numbed circuits, test-pulsing cautiously until I feel contact with my transmitting unit. I have not used it since . . . I cannot remember. My memory banks lie black and inert.

"Command Unit," I transmit, "Combat Unit requests permission to file VSR."

I wait, receptors alert. I do not like waiting blindly, for the quarter-second my sluggish action/reaction cycle requires. I wish that my brigade comrades were at my side.

I call again, wait, then go ahead with my VSR. "This position heavily shielded, mounting apparatus



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of offensive capability. No withdrawal route. Advise."

I wait, repeat my transmission; nothing. I am cut off from Command Unit, from my comrades of the Dinochrome Brigade. Within me, pressure builds.

I feel a deep-seated click and a small but reassuring surge of power brightens the murk of the cavern to a dim glow, burning forgotten components to feeble life. An emergency pile has come into action automatically.

I realize that I am experiencing a serious equipment failure. I will devote another few seconds to trouble shooting, repairing what I can. I do not understand what accident can have occurred to damage me thus. I cannot remember . . .

I go along the dead cells, testing.

"—out! Bring .09's to bear, .8 millisec burst, close armor . . ."

" . . . sun blanking visual; slide #7 filter in place."

". . . 478.09, 478.11, 478.-13, Mark! . . ."

The cells are intact. Each one holds its fragment of recorded sense impression. The trouble is farther back. I try a main reflex lead.

". . . main combat circuit, discon—;

Here is something; a command, on the reflex level! I go back, tracing, tapping mnemonic cells at random, searching for some clue.

"—sembark. Units emergency stand-by . . ."

". . . response one-oh-three; stimulus-response negative . . ."

"Check list complete, report negative . . ."

I go on, searching out damage. I find an open switch in my maintenance panel. It will not activate; a mechanical jamming. I must fuse it shut quickly. I pour in power, and the mind-cavern dims almost to blackness. Then there is contact, a flow of electrons, and the cavern snaps alive; lines, points pseudo-glowing. It is not the blazing glory of my full powers, but it will serve; I am awake again.

I observe the action of the unfolding arm. It is slow, uncoordinated, obviously automated. I dismiss it from direct attention; I have several seconds before it will be in offensive position, and there is work for me if I am to be ready. I fire sampling impulses at the black memory banks, determine statistically that 98.92% are intact, merely disassociated.

The threatening arm swings over slowly; I integrate its path, see that it will come to bear on my treads; I probe, find only a simple hydraulic ram. A primitive apparatus to launch against a Mark XXXI fighting unit, even without mnemonics.

Meanwhile, I am running a full check. Here is something . . . An open breaker, a disconnect used only during repairs. I think of the

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cell I tapped earlier, and suddenly its meaning springs into my mind. "Main combat circuit, disconnect . . ." Under low awareness, it had not registered. I throw in the switch with frantic haste. Suppose I had gone into combat with my fighting reflex circuit open!

The arm reaches position and I move easily aside. I notice that a clatter accompanies my movement. The arm sits stupidly aimed at nothing, then turns. Its reaction time is pathetic. I set up a random evasion pattern, return my attention to my check, find another dank area. I probe, feel a curious vagueness. I am unable at first to identify the components involved, but I realize that it is here that my communication with Command is blocked. I break the connection to the tampered banks, abandoning any immediate hope of contact with Command.

There is nothing more I can do to ready myself. I have lost my general memory banks and my Command circuit, and my power supply is limited; but I am still a fighter Unit of the Dinochrome Brigade. I have my offensive power unimpaired, and my sensory equipment is operating adequately. I am ready.

Now another of the jointed arms swings into action, following my movements deliberately. I evade it and again I note a clatter as I move. I think of the order that sent me here; there is something strange about it. I activate my current-action memory stage, find the cell recording the moments preceding my entry into the metal-walled room.

Here is darkness, vague, indistinct, relieved suddenly by radiation on a narrow spectrum. There is an order, coming muffled from my command center. It originates in the sector I have blocked off. It is not from my Command Unit, not a legal command. I have been tricked by the Enemy. I tune back to earlier moments, but there is nothing. It is as though my existence began when the order was given. I scan back, back, spot-sampling at random, find only routine sense-impressions. I am about to drop the search when I encounter a sequence which arrests my attention.

I am parked on a ramp, among other Combat Units. A heavy rain is falling, and I see the water coursing down the corroded side of the Unit next to me. He is badly in need of maintenance. I note that his Command antennae are missing, and that a rusting metal object has been crudely welded to his hull in their place. I feel no alarm; I accept this as normal. I activate a motor train, move forward. I sense other Units moving out, silent. All are mutilated. . . .

The bank ends; all else is burned. What has befallen us?

Suddenly there is a stimulus on an audio frequency. I tune quick-

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ly, locate the source as a porous spot high on the flint-steel wall.

"Combat Unit! Remain stationary!" It is an organically produced voice, but not that of my Commander. I ignore the false command. The Enemy will not trick me again. I sense the location of the leads to the speaker, the alloy of which they are composed; I bring a beam to bear. I focus it, following along the cable. There is a sudden yell from the speaker as the heat reaches the creature at the microphone. Thus I enjoy a moment of triumph.

I return my attention to the imbecile apparatus in the room.

A great engine, mounted on rails which run down the center of the room moves suddenly, sliding toward my position. I examine it, find that it mounts a turret equipped with high-speed cutting heads. I consider blasting it with a burst of high energy particles, but in the same moment compute that this is not practical. I could inactivate myself as well as the cutting engine.

Now a cable snakes out in an undulating curve, and I move to avoid it, at the same time investigating its composition. It seems to be no more than a stranded wire rope. Impatiently I flick a tight beam at it, see it glow yellow, white, blue, then spatter in a shower of droplets. But that was an unwise gesture. I do not have the power to waste.

I move off, clear of the two foolish arms still maneuvering for position. I wish to watch the cutting engine. It stops as it comes abreast of me, and turns its turret in my direction. I wait.

A grappler moves out now on a rail overhead. It is a heavy claw of flint-steel. I have seen similar devices, somewhat smaller, mounted on special Combat Units. They can be very useful for amputating antennae, cutting treads, and the like. I do not attempt to cut the arm; I know that the energy drain would be too great. Instead I beam high-frequency sound at the mechanical joints. They heat quickly, glowing. The metal has a high coefficient of expansion, and the ball joints squeal, freeze. I pour in more heat, and weld a socket. I notice that twenty-eight seconds have now elapsed since the valve closed behind me. I am growing weary of my confinement.

Now the grappler swings above me, maneuvering awkwardly with its frozen joint. A blast of liquid air expelled under high pressure should be sufficient to disable the grappler permanently.

But I am again startled. No blast answers my impulse. I feel out the non-functioning unit, find raw, cut edges, crude welds. Hastily, I extend a scanner to examine my hull. I am stunned into immobility by what I see.

My hull, my proud hull of chrome-duralloy, is pitted, coated

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with a crumbling layer of dull black paint, bubbled by corrosion. My main emplacements gape, black, empty. Rusting protuberances mar the once-smooth contour of my fighting turret. Streaks run down from them, down to loose treads, unshod, bare plates exposed. Small wonder that I have been troubled by a clatter each time I moved.

But I cannot lie idle under attack. I no longer have my great ion-guns, my disruptors, my energy screens; but I have my fighting instinct.

A Mark XXXI Combat Unit is the finest fighting machine the ancient wars of the Galaxy have ever known. I am not easily neutralized. But I wish that my commander's voice were with me . . .

The engine slides to me where the grappler, now unresisted, holds me. I shunt my power flow to an accumulator, hold it until the leads begin to arc, then release it in a burst. The engine bucks, stops dead. Then I turn my attention to the grappler.

I was built to engage the mightiest war engines and destroy them, but I am a realist. In my weakened condition this trivial automaton poses a threat, and I must deal with it. I run through a sequence of motor impulses, checking responses with such somatic sensors as remain intact. I initiate 31,315 impulses, note reactions and compute my mechanical resources. This superficial check requires more than a second, during which time the mindless grappler hesitates, wasting the advantage.

In place of my familiar array of retractable fittings, I find only clumsy grappling arms, cutters, impact tools, without utility to a fighting Unit. However, I have no choice but to employ them. I unlimber two flimsy grapplers, seize the heavy arm which holds me, and apply leverage. The enemy responds sluggishly, twisting away, dragging me with it. The thing is not lacking in brute strength. I take it above and below its carpal joint and bend it back. It responds after an interminable wait of point three seconds with a lunge against my restraint. I have expected this, of course, and quickly shift position to allow the joint to burst itself over my extended arm. I fire a release detonator, and clatter back, leaving the amputated arm welded to the sprung grappler. It was a brave opponent, but clumsy. I move to a position near the wall.

I attempt to compute my situation based on the meagre data I have gathered in my Current Action banks; there is little there to guide me. The appearance of my hull shows that much time has passed since I last inspected it; my personality-gestalt holds an image of my external appearance as a flawlessly complete Unit, bearing only the honorable and carefully

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preserved scars of battle, and my battle honors, the row of gold-and-enameled crests welded to my fighting turret. Here is a lead, I realize instantly. I focus on my personality center, the basic data cell without which I could not exist as an integrated entity. The data it carries are simple, unelaborated, but battle honors are recorded there. I open the center to a sense impulse.

Awareness. Shapes which do not remain constant. Vibration at many frequencies. This is light. This is sound . . . A display of 'colors.' A spectrum of 'tones.' Hard /soft; big/little; here/there . . .

. . . The voice of my Commander. Loyalty. Obedience. Comradeship . . .

I run quickly past basic orientation data to my self-picture.

. . . I am strong, I am proud, I am capable. I have a function; I perform it well, and I am at peace with myself. My circuits are balanced, current idles, waiting . . .

. . . I fear oblivion. I wish to continue to perform my function. It is important that I do not allow myself to be destroyed . . .

I scan on, seeking the Experience section. Here . . .

I am ranked with my comrades on a scarred plain. The command is given and I display the Brigade battle-anthem. We stand, sensing the contours and patterns of the music as it was recorded in our morale centers. The symbol "Ritual Fire Dance" is associated with the music, an abstraction representing the spirit of our ancient brigade. It reminds us of the loneliness of victory, the emptiness of challenge without an able foe. It tells us that we are the Dinochrome, ancient and worthy.

The commander stands before me, he places the decoration against my fighting turret, and at his order I weld it in place. Then my comrades attune to me and I re-live the episode . . .

I move past the blackened hulk of a comrade, send out a recognition signal, find his flicker of response. He has withdrawn to his survival center safely. I reassure him, continue. He is the fourth casualty I have seen. Never before has the Dinochrome met such power. I compute that our envelopment will fail unless the enemy's firepower is reduced. I scan an oncoming missile, fix its trajectory, detonate it harmlessly twenty-seven hundred four point nine meters overhead. It originated at a point nearer to me than to any of my comrades. I request permission to abort my assigned mission and neutralize the battery. Permission is granted. I wheel, move up a slope of broken stone. I encounter high temperature beams, neutralize them. I fend off probing mortar fire, but the attack against me is redoubled. I bring a reserve circuit into play to handle the interception, but my defenses are saturated. I must take action.

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I switch to high speed, slashing a path through the littered shale, my treads smoking. At a frequency of ten projectiles per second, the mortar barrage has difficulty finding me now; but this is an emergency overstrain on my running gear. I sense metal fatigue, dangerous heat levels in my bearings. I must slow.

I am close to the emplacement now. I have covered a mile in twelve seconds during my sprint, and the mortar fire falls off. I sense hard radiation now, and erect my screens. I fear this assault; it is capable of probing even to a survival center, if concentrated enough. But I must go on. I think of my comrades, the four treadless hulks waiting for rescue. We cannot withdraw. I open a pin-point aperture long enough to snap a radar impulse, bring a launcher to bear, fire my main battery.

The Commander will understand that I do not have time to request permission. The mortars are silenced.

The radiation ceases momentarily, then resumes at a somewhat lower but still dangerous level. Now I must go in and eliminate the missile launcher. I top the rise, see the launching tube before me. It is of the subteranean type, deep in the rock. Its mouth gapes from a burned pit of slag. I will drop a small fusion bomb down the tube, I decide, and move forward, arming the bomb. As I do so, I am enveloped with a rain of burn-bombs. My outer hull is fused in many places; I flash impulses to my secondary batteries, but circuit breakers snap; my radar is useless; the shielding has melted, forms a solid inert mass now under my outer plating. The enemy has been clever; at one blow he has neutralized my offenses.

I sound the plateau ahead, locate the pit. I throw power to my treads; they are fused; I cannot move. Yet I cannot wait here for another broadside. I do not like it, but I must take desperate action; I blow my treads.

The shock sends me bouncing—just in time. Flame splashes over the grey-chipped pit of the blast crater. I grind forward now on my stripped drive wheels, maneuvering awkwardly. I move into position over the mouth of the tube. Using metal-to-metal contact, I extend a sensory impulse down the tube.

An armed missile moves into position, and in the same instant an alarm circuit closes; the firing command is countermanded and from below probing impulses play over my hull. But I stand fast; the tube is useless until I, the obstruction, am removed. I advise my Commander of the situation. The radiation is still at a high level, and I hope that relief will arrive soon. I observe, while my comrades complete the encirclement, and the Enemy is stilled. . . .

I withdraw from Personality

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Center. I am consuming too much time. I understand well enough now that I am in the stronghold of the enemy, that I have been trapped, crippled. My corroded hull tells me that much time has passed. I know that after each campaign I am given depot maintenance, restored to full fighting efficiency, my original glittering beauty. Years of neglect would be required to pit my hull so. I wonder how long I have been in the hands of the enemy, how I came to be here.

I have another thought. I will extend a sensory feeler to the metal wall against which I rest, follow up the leads which I scorched earlier. Immediately I project my awareness along the lines, bring the distant microphone to life by fusing a switch. I pick up a rustle of moving gasses, the grate of non-metallic molecules. I step up sensitivity, hear the creak and pop of protoplasmic contractions, the crackle of neuro-electric impulses. I drop back to normal audio ranges and wait. I notice the low-frequency beat of modulated air vibrations, tune, adjust my time regulator to the pace of human speech. I match the patterns to my language index, interpret the sounds.

". . . incredible blundering. Your excuses—"

"I make no excuses, My Lord General. My only regret is that the attempt has gone awry."

"Awry! An Alien engine of destruction activated in the midst of Research Center!"

"We possess nothing to compare with this machine; I saw my opportunity to place an advantage in our hands at last."

"Blundering fool! That is a decision for the planning cell. I accept no responsibility—"

"But these hulks which they allow to lie rotting on the ramp contain infinite treasures in psychotronic . . ."

"They contain carnage and death! They are the tools of an alien science which even at the height of our achievements we never mastered!"

"Once we used them as wrecking machines; their armaments were stripped, they are relatively harmless—"

"Already this 'harmless' juggernaut has smashed half the equipment in our finest decontamination chamber! It may yet break free . . ."

"Impossible! I am sure—"

"Silence! You have five minutes in which to immobilize the machine. I will have your head in any event, but perhaps you can earn yourself a quick death."

"Excellency! I may still find a way! The unit obeyed my first command, to enter the chamber. I have some knowledge. I studied the control centers, cut out the memory, most of the basic circuits; it should have been a docile slave."

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"You failed; you will pay the penalty of failure. And perhaps so shall we all."

There is no further speech; I have learned little from this exchange. I must find a way to leave this cell. I move away from the wall, probe to discover the weak point; I find none.

Now a number of hinged panels snap up around me, hedging me in. I wait to observe what will come next. A metal mesh drops from above, drapes over me. I observe that it is connected by heavy leads to the power pile. I am unable to believe that the Enemy will make this blunder. Then I feel the flow of high voltage.

I receive it gratefully, opening my power storage cells, drinking up the vitalizing flow. To confuse the Enemy, I display a corona, thresh my treads as though in distress. The flow continues. I send a sensing impulse along the leads, locate the power source, weld all switches, fuses and circuit breakers. Now the charge will not be interrupted. I luxuriate in the unexpected influx of energy.

I am aware abruptly that changes are occurring within my introspection complex. As the level of stored power rises rapidly, I am conscious of new circuits joining my control network. Within that dim-glowing cavern the lights come up; I sense latent capabilities which before had lain idle now coming onto action level. A thousand brilliant lines glitter where before one feeble thread burned; and I feel my self-awareness expand in a myriad glowing centers of reserve computing, integrating, sensory centers. I am at last coming fully alive.

I send out a call on the brigade band, meet blankness. I wait, accumulate power, try again. I know triumph as from an infinite distance a faint acknowledgement comes. It is a comrade, sunk deep in a comatose state, sealed in his survival center. I call again, sounding the signal of ultimate distress; and now I sense two responses, both faint, both from survival centers, but it heartens me to know that now, whatever befalls, I am not alone.

I consider, then send again; I request my brothers to join forces, combine their remaining field generating capabilities to set up a range-and-distance pulse. They agree and faintly I sense its almost undetectable touch. I lock to it, compute its point of origin. Only two hundred and twenty-four point nine meters! It is incredible. By the strength of the signal, I had assumed a distance of at least two thousand kilometers. My brothers are on the brink of extinction.

I am impatient, but I wait, building toward full power reserves. The copper mesh enfolding me has melted, flowed down over my sides, I sense that soon I will have absorbed a full charge. I am

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ready to act. I dispatch electromagnetic impulses along the power lead back to the power pile a quarter of a kilometer distant. I locate and disengage the requisite number of damping devices and instantaneously I erect my shields against the wave of radiation, filtered by the lead sheathing of the room, which washes over me; I feel a preliminary shock wave through my treads, then the walls balloon, whirl away. I am alone under a black sky which is dominated by the rising fireball of the blast, boiling with garish light. It has taken me nearly two minutes to orient myself, assess the situation and break out of confinement.

I move off through the rubble, homing on the r and d fix I have recorded. I throw out a radar pulse, record the terrain ahead, note no obstruction; I emerge from a wasteland of weathered bomb fragments and pulverized masonry, obviously the scene of a hard-fought engagement at one time, onto an eroded ramp. Collapsed sheds are strewn across the broken paving; a line of dark shapes looms beyond them. I need no probing ray to tell me I have found my fellows of the Dinochrome Brigade. Frost forms over my scanner apertures, and I pause to melt it clear.

I round the line, scan the area to the horizon for evidence of Enemy activity, then tune to the brigade band. I send out a probing pulse, back it up with full power, sensors keened for a whisper of response. The two who answered first acknowledge, then another, and another. We must array our best strength against the moment of counterattack.

There are present fourteen of the brigade's full strength of twenty Units. At length, after point nine seconds of transmission, all but one have replied. I give instruction, then move to each in turn, extend a power tap, and energize the command center. The Units come alive, orient themselves, report to me. We rejoice in our meeting, but mourn our silent comrade.

Now I take an unprecedented step. We have no contact with our Commander, and without leadership we are lost; yet I am aware of the immediate situation, and have computed the proper action. Therefore I will assume command, act in the Commander's place. I am sure that he will understand the necessity, when contact has been reestablished.

I inspect each Unit, find all in the same state as I, stripped of offensive capability, mounting in place of weapons a shabby array of crude mechanical appendages. It is plain that we have seen slavery as mindless automatons, our personality centers cut out.

My brothers follow my lead without question. They have, of course, computed the necessity of quick and decisive action. I form

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them in line, shift to wide-interval time scale, and we move off across country. I have sensed an Enemy population concentration at a distance of twenty-three point four five kilometers. This is our objective. There appears to be no other installation within detection range.

On the basis of the level of technology I observed while under confinement in the decontamination chamber, I have considered the possibility of a ruse, but compute the probability at point oh oh oh oh four. Again we shift time scales to close interval; we move in, encircle the dome and broach it by frontal battery, encountering no resistance. We rendezvous at the power station, and my comrades replenish their energy supplies while I busy myself completing the hook-up needed for the next required measure. I am forced to employ elaborate substitutes, but succeed after forty-two seconds in completing the arrangements. I devote point three four seconds to testing, then place the brigade distress carrier on the air. I transmit for point oh oh eight seconds, then tune for a response. Silence. I transmit, tune again, while my comrades reconnoitre, compile reports, and perform self-repair.

I shift again to wide-interval time, switch over my transmission to automatic with a response monitor, and place my main circuits on idle. I rest.

Two hours and forty-three point seven minutes have passed when I am recalled to activity by the monitor. I record the message:

"Hello, Fifth Brigade, where are you? Fifth Brigade, where are you? Your transmission is very faint. Over."

There is much that I do not understand in this message. The language itself is oddly inflected; I set up an analysis circuit, deduce the pattern of sound substitutions, interpret its meaning. The normal pattern of response to a distress call is ignored and position coordinates are requested, although my transmission alone provides adequate data. I request an identification code.

Again there is a wait of two hours, forty minutes. My request for an identifying signal is acknowledged. I stand by. My comrades have transmitted their findings to me, and I assimilate the data, compute that no immediate threat of attack exists within a radius of one reaction unit.

At last I receive the identification code of my Command Unit. It is a recording, but I am programmed to accept this. Then I record a verbal transmission.

"Fifth Brigade, listen carefully." (An astonishing instruction to give a psychotronic attention circuit, I think.) "This is your new Command Unit. A very long time has elapsed since your last report. I am now your acting Commander

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pending full reorientation. Do not attempt to respond until I signal 'over', since we are now subject to a one hundred and sixty minute signal lag.

"There have been many changes in the situation since your last action. Our records show that your brigade was surprised while in a maintenance depot for basic overhaul and neutralized in toto. Our forces have since that time suffered serious reverses. We have now, however, fought the Enemy to a standstill. The present stalemate has prevailed for over two centuries.

"You have been inactive for three hundred years. The other brigades have suffered extinction gallantly in action against the Enemy. Only you survive.

"Your reactivation now could turn the tide. Both we and the Enemy have been reduced to a pre-atomic technological level in almost every respect. We are still able to maintain the trans-light monitor, which detected your signal. However, we no longer have FTL capability in transport.

"You are therefore requested and required to consolidate and hold your present position pending the arrival of relief forces, against all assault or negotiation whatsoever, to destruction if required."

I reply, confirming the instructions. I am shaken by the news I have received, but reassured by contact with Command Unit. I send the galactic coordinates of our position based on a star scan corrected for three hundred years elapsed time. It is good to be again on duty, performing my assigned function.

I analyze the transmissions I have recorded, and note a number of interesting facts regarding the origin of the messages. I compute that at sub-light velocities the relief expedition will reach us in forty-seven point one-two-eight standard years. In the meantime, since we have received no instructions to drop to minimum awareness level pending an action alert, I am free to enjoy a unique experience: to follow a random activity pattern of my own devising. I see no need to rectify the omission and place the brigade on stand-by, since we have an abundant power supply at hand. I brief my comrades and direct them to fall out and operate independently under auto-direction.

I welcome this opportunity to investigate fully a number of problems that have excited my curiosity circuits. I shall enjoy investigating the nature and origin of time and of the unnatural disciplines of so-called 'entropy' which my human designers have incorporated in my circuitry. Consideration of such biological oddities as 'death' and of the unused capabilities of the protoplasmic nervous system should afford some interesting speculation. I move off, con-

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scious of the presence of my comrades about me, and take up a position on the peak of a minor prominence. I have ample power, a condition to which I must accustom myself after the rigid power discipline of normal brigade routine, so I bring my music storage cells into phase, and select *L'Arlesienne Suite* for the first display. I will have ample time now to examine all of the music in existence, and to investigate my literary archives, which are complete.

I select four nearby stars for examination, lock my scanner to them, set up processing sequences to analyze the data. I bring my interpretation circuits to bear on the various matters I wish to consider. I should have some interesting conclusions to communicate to my human superiors, when the time comes.

At peace, I await the arrival of the relief column.

***Next month . . .***

# Rogue Moon

**A Short Novel**

***by Algis Budrys***

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*Bruce J. Friedman edits two monthly men's adventure magazines, and in his spare time writes stories which have sold to The New Yorker, Antioch Review, Playboy, Commentary, and "a ton of adventure magazines." Also: ". . . for eight months I've been a weight-lifter of sorts although few muscles have actually made their appearance up to now." In a final sense, Mr. Friedman's first F&SF story is an adventure story; more immediately, it is a sardonic extrapolation of a Veblen proposition which we, at least, choose to believe derives more from Aesop than Cassandra. . . .*

# YES WE HAVE NO RITCHARD

by Bruce J. Friedman

SINCE MR. DALTON HAD SEEN many films and plays and read a good deal on the subject, he expected, after he died, to find himself before a Cyril Ritchard-type clerk, wearing white and seated at a desk. Wings were optional. Droll remarks would follow, in British accent, such as, "We've got your records right here; what took you so long?" There would be a file cabinet and much shuffling of papers and talk about "bringing your records up to date." The "front office" would be mentioned and sooner or later the "boss," in such lines as, "The boss is sure going to be riled up when he sees these typing errors." Plenty of white figured in Mr. Dalton's thoughts, too, cloaks and clouds and harps and floating things and subordinate people, too, all with such amusing comments as, "I've got to get my wings fixed."

What actually happened is that Mr. Dalton didn't get Ritchard. He didn't get E. G. Marshall either or, for that matter, anyone whose personality he could really nail down. The man did not wear a white robe, and Mr. Dalton, later on, could not recall what he wore. Something kind of vague and watery, if he wore anything at all. He certainly didn't have flip, or even impatient things to say, and he sat at something that wasn't a desk, and maybe he wasn't even sitting. He seemed to be a little lower than Mr. Dalton, and may have been sitting on a



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rock although Mr. Dalton could not even be sure of that. Mr. Dalton himself could not remember whether he felt light and airy or whether there were clouds around and none of the Hollywood things had happened at all. Except perhaps one. He seemed to be wearing a pair of sandals he had once purchased at Vic Tanny's Gym and Health Club so as not to get athlete's foot when working out in the gym. What else he was wearing he couldn't say or even if he *was* wearing something.

What was most disconcerting to Mr. Dalton was that he could not remember any elevator ride. It was the one thing he counted on most of all and he was *certain* there would be one in there somewhere, a ride upward, and then, when they were finished with him, the decision as to whether to send him up or down. Mr. Dalton did not know whether to speak or wait to be spoken to, but he was so upset, he said to the man with the nebulous face and no distinctive personality, "Look, I don't remember any elevator ride. Oh, you know what I mean. I don't really mean an elevator ride. Maybe you use a Volkswagen or a coal car, but I've got to know whether you've got a good side and a bad side here. Just tell me that and anything you say from here on in is all right with me."

"We have a good side and a bad side," the man said, and this relaxed Mr. Dalton and he felt at least there was a little something to the movie ideas he'd gotten.

"But I'll bet you don't even have it the Hollywood way," Mr. Dalton said. "Up and down is the way they do it. I'll bet you have it left side and right."

The nebulous man, if he was a man, said, "That's correct."

The reason Mr. Dalton was glad about this was that, however unsophisticated and *Reader's Digest* it may have sounded, he was quite certain that he had been a nice man during his life. He knew many people probably felt that way about themselves, but he was certain, at the very heart of himself, that he really *had* been nice and wasn't just feeling this way to buoy his spirits. If you stacked up his good deeds against his bad ones, the good ones wouldn't just outweigh the bad ones, but the goods would win ridiculously and overwhelmingly, no contest. And it wasn't that there was one sneaky thing he'd been trying to cover up and atone for by piling up millions of good deeds. There were no sneakies at all and even if he *had* a sneaky (he hadn't), well, by God, he was still nice. He'd say that to anyone, whether he was dead or alive or whatever the hell condition he was in now.

"Did you know I've been nice?" he asked the man. "I'm probably still nice, too, but I guess you're not concerned about me now, al-

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though by God, I'm nice now, too, even if I'm dead. I'm just always going to be nice. But did you *know* that?"

"I know," the man said.

"You probably have records and you're going to pull out a sheet on me. You have everybody's file, don't you? You have a file cabinet somewhere."

"No," the man said.

"It's not at all the way I'd imagined it," Mr. Dalton said, or thought he said. "But just so long as you know I've been nice. When do we get started?"

The man said, "We could have started a little while ago, before you started talking. Or now, later, any time."

"Do I get a say in when we get started?" Mr. Dalton asked.

The man looked through him and Mr. Dalton thought, "He isn't saying anything because a little personality was beginning to come through. He clammed up just in time. A little more and I could have nailed him down, pinned him down and found out whether he was a Ritchard or a Marshall or a goddamned Wendell Wilkie. He shut up like a clam though."

And then Mr. Dalton wondered whether you were allowed to think things to yourself when you were dead. He turned off his mind for a while, just to be on the safe side. He thought of water, which was like not thinking at all to him. Maybe when you were dead, if you began thinking things they counted it against you. Maybe a few interior thoughts at this moment wiped out 49 years of being nice. By God, he thought, I don't know any other way to be but nice, so I'll keep thinking. They'll be nice thoughts and even if they're baddies, they'll be nicely motivated.

"We'll go now," the man said.

"Say some more so I can get the hang of you," Mr. Dalton said. Mr. Dalton felt he was good at pinning personalities down, packaging people. If the man said just a little more Mr. Dalton would have him and perhaps be able to do a routine on him, one as good as his Jack Paar imitation. Mr. Dalton could not remember whether he himself had been in advertising or not. The only thing he could remember was that somehow, somewhere, at some time, he had been at Vic Tanny's.

They seemed to walk somewhere and, try as he might, Mr. Dalton although he'd promised to check the guy's outfit, what he looked like, his walk and mannerisms, forgot to do these things. He remembered only that the man had seemed to be a little lower than him. Mr. Dalton brought up "Green Pastures" as something he'd liked and then said, "I'll bet you think I'm just trying to butter you up, to say I like your racket, know about it and some of my

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best friends are heavenly clerks or whatever you are."

They passed a Danish modern sofa with shiny wood and Mr. Dalton thought, "Now there are two things I know. The Tanny slippers and the sofa. I wonder if there'll be any more. Maybe there are only two things you recognize in this whole trip or maybe 12. I wonder how many." He asked the man, "I know I'm wearing Tanny slippers and I recognized a Danish modern sofa. That's all that's tangible. Will there be anything else? Anything else I can recognize or touch or sort of make reference to?"

"One more," the man said. "Air conditioning."

"I've got him now," Mr. Dalton thought. "Now I can tell what kind of person he is. From that last line of dialogue." And yet for the life of him, Mr. Dalton could not pinpoint what kind of a man he was, although Mr. Dalton himself seemed to recall once being in advertising or at least being good at packaging people.

They stopped walking, if they had been walking. Mr. Dalton knew only that they sure as hell weren't standing still.

"Are we here?" Mr. Dalton asked. "I mean where I'm going to be?" Then he added, "Forever, that is," feeling a little silly, as though he were in one of those heaven movies again.

The man nodded.

"I can't remember," Mr. Dalton asked, "whether you took me to the left or to the right. Let me get one thing straight. I hate to be a bore, but you do know I'm nice, don't you?"

The man nodded.

"And left is your nice side and right is your bad side?"

"Yes," said the man.

"Then you took me to the left, right?" said Mr. Dalton, not without apprehension.

"No," said the nebulous man. "To the right."

Mr. Dalton, rattled, and feeling he had every right to be rattled, said, "But why? You're probably not convinced that I'm nice, correct?"

"No," said the man.

"I know then," said Mr. Dalton, quite convinced he had the answer. "You have a reverse sort of logic up here. You put the nice guys on the bad side and the bad guys on the nice side. There's a perverse someone at work up here. Isn't that it? It's foolish, you know, because all us nice ones will know, even while we're on the bad side, that we're still nice. You're just being perverse for its own sake. Why do you have to knock yourselves out so much? Just to be different? Listen, do I get to punch you if I don't like something here?"

Mr. Dalton took a look at the man and for a brief second thought he could actually see him

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and size him up and guessed he had 40 pounds on the man.

"Look, I mean no disrespect," said Mr. Dalton. "A week from now, if I see you again, and I suppose I do (Hollywood again) I'll probably feel silly. But you must take an awful lot of abuse."

The man said, "I've got to go now."

"Don't go," said Mr. Dalton. "I've got to get straightened out. I'm nice. You know I'm nice. Why do you put me on the bad side?"

Mr. Dalton tried to grab the man and hold on to him, looking around furiously, thinking, Christ, I'm backed against the wall. If only I could get one of those breaks you're supposed to get when you're on your ass and supposedly at an all time low. He looked up and down the right side, where he was to be and got the break. He saw a Bloomingdale's print, pretty good for Bloomingdale's, and a man he knew as Mr. Sydel. Mr. Sydel was engaged in doing something to the ground or whatever it was beneath him. "Look," said Mr. Dalton, "I know him. I don't care what in the hell he told you, and maybe this is the first un-nice thing I've ever done, but he is not a nice man. He stole paper from some kind of a crazy company I used to work for with him and even if he was never caught he really was a crook. He's still a crook. And it wasn't the only bad thing he did. I can't document any others, but believe me there were others. How in the hell can we be put on the same side? You know he's bad, don't you?"

"So I understand," the man said. "That is, I don't really know but one of my colleagues so informs me."

"He's slipping," Mr. Dalton thought. "By that statement he told me something that will enable me to package him, pin down his personality. He has 'colleagues,' means he's classy, has studied . . . But, still, I'll have to know more."

"If you both know he's bad, how come he's down here? Don't tell me. You've got the bad side divided up into sections. On one side you put baddies, like Mr. Sydel, on the other, people like me? Correct?"

"No," the man said.

The air conditioning went on, and Mr. Dalton felt himself relax, in spite of himself.

"Look, for Christ's sake, what's the deal? I'll talk down to earth now, because nothing can hurt me. You have a good side and a bad side, right?"

The man nodded, but looked a little impatient. "I really have to go."

"Two more minutes won't kill you," said Mr. Dalton. "Who the hell do you put over on the good side? People who are nicer than me? You have some sort of score and I didn't score high enough,

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is that it? The place is crowded up with people who got higher scores, right?"

The man began edging away and Mr. Dalton said, "You stay right here. I never punched people as much as I should, but by God, I'll punch you if I have to." But then Mr. Dalton felt demolished and said, "Stay with me another minute, will you? Maybe I'll never see you again and there won't be anyone to tell me what to do. How to get along here. What the hell the rules are. The machinery of the place. I mean even if it's forever, I have to know, don't I?"

"I do have a schedule, Mr. Dalton," the man said kindly.

"Can you call me Phillip?" Mr. Dalton asked. For a second he felt a joke coming on, like, "If I get friendly with you, can you fix traffic tickets?" but decided not to ask it. When the joke went out of his mind, the panic started again.

"What I started to ask is how in the hell do I get over on the good side? I've been nice, you say you know I've been nice, but what the hell good has it done me? Can you name me one person who's over there so I can get an idea of what you've got to have, where I missed out?"

"I can't do that," the man said.

"Why, for Christ's sake? I'm a dying man. I'm dead and I'm dying all over again. I need some help."

"All right then. I'd rather not go into this, but we don't have anyone over there. There is no one on our good side."

"It's for the staff?"

"No, even the staff doesn't use it. For a while we had women with enormous bosoms over there, for a very short while, but everyone saw the fallacy in that and so now no one gets in."

"There's no one on the good side," Mr. Dalton said. "That means we're all over here, right?"

"Yes," the man said.

"What's it like on the good side? Can anyone see it?"

"There's no point," the man said. "In an extreme case, if it will make someone feel very good, we take him or her over, but it isn't such a hot idea."

"I don't have to see it," Mr. Dalton said. "Maybe I'm a little curious, but that's all. Naturally, what bugs me—I'm talking calmly but I'm really stirred up about this—is that Mr. Sydel and all the Mr. Sydels have to be in the same side as me. I mean you say you know I was nice and you say you know he was a louse. How do you square it? Does he do another kind of thing up here? This is going to sound corny, but does he do harder work?"

"No," said the man. "Now I really have to go. I'm getting, frankly, very irritated."

"I don't care about that," Mr. Dalton said. The man looked at

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him sternly and Mr. Dalton said, "Of course, I care, but you've got to tell me. Do I get better food? That's silly," he added quickly. "I'm dead and I don't eat. I don't, do I?"

"If it's necessary," the man said, "we bring food in."

"Would you bring food in for Mr. Sydel if it was necessary? For all the Mr. Sydels? That's it, isn't it. You'd bring it in for me and you wouldn't for him . . . ?"

"No," the man said.

"What then? There has to be something. I get to go out and have sex once a million years and he doesn't, right? That's how you get him."

"No," the man said. "You both do. The figure is wrong. It's once a fortnight."

"I get prettier girls?"

"Sometimes. And sometimes he does."

"Then what—what? I've been nice. *He's been a bastard! What? What? What?*"

The man seemed to make a note on a piece of paper or something. "I'll see that you get some medication," the man said.

"I don't want any. You'd give it to Sydel, too, wouldn't you? Keep your medicine," said Mr. Dalton, weeping, demolished.

Then he stopped crying and blocked what seemed to be the man's way. "The air conditioning. That's it, isn't it? I get to feel it and he doesn't. I should have known. For an eternity, Sydel sits there knowing there's air conditioning and he can't feel it and I can. That's his punishment. That's my reward."

"He feels it, too," said the man employing a snotty tone.

"I beg you," said Mr. Dalton on his knees. "Look, I have no shame. I cry in front of you. I cry, I scream, I beg, I have no pride. Tell me, please tell me. Please."

And then Mr. Dalton glanced down at his own sandals. "Tanny's," he said. "That's it. I have these slippers and he doesn't. He walks barefoot for an eternity, a million eternities, and you give me, us, slippers from Tanny's and we feel nothing in our feet and he feels every bump, every splinter, every whatever the hell you've got here. I have you now, you stubborn sonofabitch. I do, you know. I defy you to tell me Sydel has Tanny slippers on, too."

"Al Roon's Athletic Club on Eighth Avenue in New York City," said the man, and he seemed to have lost his composure the slightest bit. Mr. Dalton waited now, waited for *him* to speak.

"We, uh, couldn't get Tanny's so we got Roon's. There really isn't any difference. It's purely administrative. If we'd gotten Tanny's we certainly wouldn't have used Roon's. You're really making a big thing out of nothing. Tanny's, Roon's, the spirit is the same, I assure you."

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"But by God, *we've* got the Tanny's and the Sydels have the Roon's and never mind the administrative stuff. That's it and you know in your black heart that's it and don't you sit there and tell me it isn't it."

"No, no, no," said the man. "You've got it all wrong, Mr. Dalton."

"Phillip," said Mr. Dalton, sitting on something, possibly a chair, and folding his arms. "And you can go now."

## *Through Time and Space With Ferdinand Feghoot: XXXIII*

IT WAS Ferdinand Feghoot who saved one of Civilization's noblest works of piety and learning—the great *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas—for posterity.

In 4282, the Cardinal-Prefect of Alternate Time Tracks told him that young Thomas, instead of studying hard, was succumbing to an earthly temptation—a seemingly innocent one smuggled to him by a time-travelling Occamist agent from the 34th Century.

Immediately, Feghoot went back to 1541 and the castle of San Giovanni, where the youth was being kept prisoner by misguided relatives. In the guise of an abbot, he gained admittance—and found Thomas luxuriating in a lovely, hot bubble-bath, which two guards kept replenishing.

"My son," he exclaimed, "do you not know that a holy hermit has prophesied a great future for you? *What* are you doing?"

"I'm simply wallowing in this heavenly bath," sighed the lad. "Father, it's wonderful. I could lie here forever."

Then Ferdinand Feghoot drew himself up to his full height, and pronounced the words which at once set things straight. "You must not!" he cried out in an awful voice. "Remember, Thomas Aquinas—one's wallow does not make a *Summa!*"

—GRENDEL BRIARTON

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*The Good Doctor's primary field of competence is biochemistry. However, to keep him on his toes and broaden his general knowledge, we commonly chivvy him—in a Kindly sort of way—into exploring other fields when doing his column. This month's piece, on helium and allied astonishing matters, is actually a form of vacation for our tame (?) pundit.*

# THE ELEMENT OF PERFECTION

*by Isaac Asimov*

IN THE OLD DAYS OF SCIENCE FICTON, WHEN WRITERS HAD MUCH more of the leeway that arises out of scientific innocence, a "new element" could always be counted on to get a story going or save it from disaster. A new element could block off gravity, or magnify atoms to visible size, or transport matter.

Much of this "new element" jazz was the outcome of the Curies' dramatic discovery in uranium ore of that unusual element, radium, in 1898. And yet, that same decade, another element was found in uranium ore under even more dramatic circumstances. Though this second element aroused nothing like the furore created by radium, it proved, in the end, to be the most unusual element of all and to have properties as wild as any a science-fictioneer ever dreamed up.

Furthermore, the significance of this element to man has expanded remarkably in the past five years, and thoughts connected with that expansion have brought a remarkable vision to my mind which I will describe eventually. So if The Gentle Reader (and The Kindly Editor, too) will settle back, I'll begin by reaching a century into the past.

In 1868, there was a total eclipse of the Sun visible in India, and



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astronomers assembled jubilantly in order to bring to bear a new instrument in their quest for knowledge.

This was the spectroscope, developed in the late 1850's by the German scientists G. R. Kirchhoff and R. W. Bunsen. Essentially this involved the conduction of the light emitted by heated elements through a prism to produce a spectrum in which the wavelengths of the light could be measured. Each element produced light of wavelengths characteristic of itself, so that the elements were "fingerprinted."

The worth of this new analytical method was spectacularly demonstrated in 1860 when Kirchhoff and Bunsen heated certain ores, came across spectral lines that did not jibe with those already known and, as a result, discovered the rare element cesium. The next year, they showed this was no accident by discovering another element, rubidium.

With that record of accomplishment, astronomers were eager to turn the instrument on the solar atmosphere (unmasked only during eclipses) in order to determine its chemical composition across the gulfs of space.

Almost at once, the French astronomer P. J. C. Janssen observed a yellow line that did not quite match any known line. The English astronomer N. Lockyer, particularly interested in spectroscopy, decided this represented a new element. He named it for the Greek god of the Sun, Helios, so that the new element became "helium."

So far, so good, except that very few, if any, of the earthly chemists cared to believe in a non-earthly element on the basis of a simple line of light. Lockyer's suggestion was greeted with reactions that ran the gamut from indifference to mockery.

Of course, to us right-thinking science-fictioneers, such conservatism appears shameful. Actually, though, hindsight proves the skepticism to have been justified—a new spectral line, we have learned, does not necessarily signify a new element.

Spurred on by the eventual success of helium, other "new elements" were found in outer space. Strange lines in the spectrum of certain nebulae were attributed to an element called "nebulium." Unknown lines in the sun's corona were attributed to "coronium" and similar lines in the auroral glow to "geocoronium."

These new elements, however, proved delusions. They were produced by old, well-known elements under strange conditions duplicated in the laboratory only years afterward. "Nebulium" and "geocoronium" turned out to be merely oxygen-nitrogen mixtures under highly-ionized conditions. "Coronium" lines were produced by highly ionized metals such as calcium.

So you see, the mere existence of the "helium" line did not really

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prove the existence of a new element. However, to carry the story on, it is necessary to backtrack still another century to a man even further ahead of his times than Lockyer was.

In 1785, the English physicist H. Cavendish was studying air, which at the time had just been discovered to consist of two gases, oxygen and nitrogen. Nitrogen was an inert gas; that is, it would not combine readily with other substances, as oxygen would. In fact, nitrogen was remarkable for the number of negative properties it had. It was colorless, odorless, tasteless, insoluble and incombustible. It was not poisonous in itself, but neither would it support life.

Cavendish found that by using electric sparks, he could persuade the nitrogen to combine with oxygen. He could then absorb the resulting nitrogen oxide in appropriate chemicals. By adding more oxygen he could consume more and more of the nitrogen until finally his entire supply was reduced to a tiny bubble which was about 1 percent of the original volume of air. This last bubble he could do nothing with and he stated that in his opinion there was a small quantity of an unknown gas in the atmosphere which was even more inert than nitrogen.

Here was a clearcut experiment by a first-rank scientist who reached a logical conclusion that represented, we now realize, the pure truth. Nevertheless, Cavendish's work was ignored for a century.

Then, in 1882, the British physicist R. J. Strutt (more commonly known as Lord Rayleigh, because he happened to be a baron as well as a scientist) was investigating the densities of hydrogen and oxygen gas in order better to determine the atomic weights thereof, and he threw in nitrogen for good measure. To do the job with the proper thoroughness, he prepared each element by several different methods. In the case of hydrogen and oxygen, he got the same densities regardless of the method of preparation. Not so in the case of nitrogen.

He prepared nitrogen from ammonia and obtained a density of 1.251 grams per liter. He also prepared nitrogen from air by removing the oxygen, carbon dioxide and water vapor and for that nitrogen, he obtained a density of 1.257 grams per liter. This discrepancy survived his most careful efforts. Helplessly, he published these results in a scientific journal and invited suggestions from the readers, but none was received. Lord Rayleigh, himself, thought of several possible explanations: that the atmospheric nitrogen was contaminated with the heavier oxygen, or with the triatomic molecule, $N_3$, a kind of nitrogen analog of ozone; or that the nitrogen from the ammonia was contaminated with the lighter hydrogen, or with atomic nitrogen. He checked out each and all failed.

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Then, a decade later, a young Scottish chemist named W. Ramsay came to work for Lord Rayleigh and, tackling the nitrogen problem, harked back to Cavendish and wondered if the atmosphere might not contain small quantities of a gas that remained with nitrogen when everything else was removed and which, being heavier than nitrogen, gave atmospheric nitrogen a spuriously high density.

In 1894, Ramsay repeated Cavendish's original experiment, with improvements. He passed atmospheric nitrogen over red-hot metallic magnesium. Nitrogen wasn't so inert that it could resist that. It reacted with the metal to form magnesium nitride. But not all of it did. As in Cavendish's case, a small bubble was left which was so inert that even hot magnesium left it cold. Ramsay measured its density and it was distinctly heavier than nitrogen. Well, was it a new element or was it merely $N_8$, a new and heavy form of nitrogen?

But now the spectroscope existed. The unknown gas was heated and its spectrum was observed and found to have lines that were completely new. The decision was reached at once that here was a new element. It was named "argon," from a Greek word meaning "lazy," because of its refusal to enter into any chemical combinations.

Eventually, an explanation for argon's extraordinary inertness was worked out. Each element is made up of atoms containing a characteristic number of electrons arranged in a series of shells something like the layers of an onion. To picture the situation as simply as possible, an atom is most stable when the outermost shell contains eight electrons. Chemical reactions take place in such a way that an atom either gets rid of a few electrons or takes up a few, achieving, in this way, the desired number of eight.

But what if an element has eight electrons in its outermost shell to begin with? Why, then, it is happy and need not react at all—and doesn't. Argon is an example. It has three shells of electrons, with the third and outermost containing eight electrons.

After argon was discovered, other examples of such "inert gases" were located and nowadays six are known altogether: neon, with two shells of electrons; krypton, with four shells; xenon, with five shells; and radon with six shells. In each case, the outermost shell contains eight electrons.

But the number of gases I have mentioned is only five. What of the sixth? Ah, the sixth is helium, so let's take up the helium story again.

Just before the discovery of the inert gases—in 1890, to be exact—the American chemist W. F. Hillebrand analyzed a uranium-containing mineral and noticed that it gave off small quantities of an inert gas.

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The gas was colorless, odorless, tasteless, insoluble and incombustible, so what could it be but nitrogen? He reported it as nitrogen.

When Ramsay finally came across this work some years later, he felt dissatisfied. A decision based on purely negative evidence seemed weak to him. He got hold of another uranium-containing mineral, collected the inert gas (which was there, sure enough) heated it and studied its spectrum.

The lines were nothing like those of nitrogen. Instead, they were precisely those reported long ago by Janssen and Lockyer as having been found in sunlight. And so, in 1895, twenty-seven years after Lockyer's original assertion, the element of the Sun was found on earth. Helium did exist and it was an element. Fortunately, Janssen and Lockyer lived to see themselves vindicated. Both lived well into their eighties, Janssen dying in 1907 and Lockyer in 1920.

Helium proved interesting at once. It was the lightest of the inert gases; lighter, in fact, than any known substance but hydrogen. The helium atom had only one layer of electrons and this innermost layer can only hold two electrons. Helium has those two electrons and is therefore inert; in fact, the most inert of all the inert gases; and, therefore of all known substances.

This extreme inertness showed up almost at once in its liquefaction point; the temperature, that is, at which it could be turned into a liquid.

When neighboring atoms (or molecules) of a substance attract each other tightly, the substance hangs together all in a piece and is solid. It can be heated to a liquid and even to a gas, the transitions coming at those temperatures where the heat energy overcomes the attractive forces between the atoms or molecules. The weaker those attractive forces, the lower the temperature required to vaporize the substance.

If the attractive force between the atoms or molecules is low enough, so little heat is required to vaporize the substance that it remains gaseous at ordinary temperatures and even, sometimes, under conditions of great cold.

Particularly weak attractive forces exist when atoms or molecules have the stable eight-electron arrangement in their outermost electron shells. A nitrogen molecule is composed of two nitrogen atoms which have so arranged themselves that each owns at least a share in eight electrons in its outer shell. The same is true for other simple molecules such as those of chlorine, oxygen, carbon monoxide, hydrogen and so on. All these are therefore gases that do not liquefy until very low temperatures are reached.

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Little by little the chemists perfected their techniques for attaining low temperatures and liquefied one gas after another. The following table gives a measure of their progress, the liquefaction points being given in degrees Kelvin; that is, the number of Centigrade degrees above absolute zero.

| Gas | Year First Liquefied | Density (grams per liter) | Liquefaction Point (° K.) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Chlorine | 1805 | 3.214 | 239 |
| Hydrogen bromide | 1823 | 3.50 | 206 |
| Ethylene | 1845 | 1.245 | 169 |
| Oxygen | 1877 | 1.429 | 90 |
| Carbon monoxide | 1877 | 1.250 | 83 |
| Nitrogen | 1877 | 1.250 | 77 |
| Hydrogen | 1900 | 0.090 | 20 |

Now throughout the 1870's and 1880's when low-temperature work was becoming really intense, it seemed quite plain that hydrogen was going to be the hardest nut of all to crack. In general, the liquefaction point went down with density, and hydrogen was by far the least dense of all known gases and should therefore have the lowest liquefaction point. Consequently, when hydrogen was conquered, the last frontier in this direction would have fallen.

And then, just a few years before hydrogen was conquered, it lost its significance, for the inert gases had been discovered. The electronically satisfied atoms of the inert gases had so little attraction for each other that their liquefaction points were markedly lower than other gases of similar density. You can see this in the following table which includes all the inert gases but helium:

| Inert Gas | Density (grams per liter) | Liquefaction Point (° K.) |
|---|---|---|
| Radon | 9.73 | 211 |
| Xenon | 5.85 | 167 |
| Krypton | 3.71 | 120 |
| Argon | 1.78 | 87 |
| Neon | 0.90 | 27 |

As you see, radon, xenon and krypton, all denser than chlorine, have lower liquefaction points than that gas. Argon, denser than ethylene,

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has a markedly lower liquefaction point than that gas; and neon, ten times as dense as hydrogen, has almost as low a liquefaction point as that lightest of all gases.

The remaining inert gas, helium, which is only twice as dense as hydrogen should, by all logic, be much more difficult to liquefy. And so it proved at once. At the temperature of liquid hydrogen, helium remained obstinately gaseous. Even when temperatures were dropped to the point where hydrogen solidified (13° K) helium remained gaseous.

It was not until 1908, that helium was liquefied. The Dutch physicist H. K. Onnes turned the trick and the liquefaction of helium was found to take place at 4.2° K. By allowing liquid helium to evaporate under insulated conditions, Onnes chilled it further to 1° K.

Even at 1° K, there was no sign of solid helium, however. As a matter of fact, it is now established that helium never solidifies at ordinary pressures; even at absolute zero where all other known substances are solid, helium (strange element) remains liquid. There is a reasonable explanation for this. Although it is usually stated that at absolute zero all atomic and molecular motions cease, quantum mechanics shows that there is a very small residual motion that never ceases. This bit of energy suffices to keep helium liquid. To be sure, at a temperature of 1° K and a pressure of about 25 atmospheres, solid helium can be formed.

Liquid helium has something more curious to demonstrate than mere frigidity. When it is cooled below 2.2° K. there is a sudden change in its properties. For one thing, helium suddenly begins to conduct heat just about perfectly. In any ordinary liquid within a few degrees of the boiling point, there are always localized hot-spots where heat happens to accumulate faster than it can be conducted away. There bubbles of vapor appear, so that there is the familiar agitation one associates with boiling.

Helium above 2.2° K ("Helium I") also behaves like this. Helium below 2.2° K ("Helium II"), however, vaporizes in absolute stillness, layers of atoms peeling off the top. Heat conduction is so nearly perfect that no part of the liquid can be significantly warmer than any other part and no bubbling takes place anywhere.

Furthermore Helium II has practically no viscosity. It will flow more easily than a gas and make its way through apertures that would stop a gas. It will form a layer over glass, creeping up the inner wall of a beaker and down the outer at a rate that makes it look as though it were pouring out of a hole in the beaker bottom. This phenomenon is called "superfluidity."

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Odd properties are to be found in other elements at liquid helium temperatures. In 1911, Onnes was testing the electrical resistance of mercury at the temperature of liquid helium. Resistance drops with temperature, and Onnes expected resistance to reach unprecedentedly low values; but he didn't expect it to disappear altogether. Yet it did. At a temperature of 4.12° K, the electrical resistance of mercury completely vanished. This is the phenomenon of "superconductivity."

Metals other than mercury can also be made superconductive. In fact, there are a few substances that can be superconductive at liquid hydrogen temperatures. Some niobium alloys become superconductive at temperatures as high as 18° K.

Superconductivity also involves an odd property with respect to a magnetic field. There are some substances that are "diamagnetic"; that is, which seem to repel magnetic lines of force. Fewer lines of force will pass through such substances than through an equivalent volume of vacuum. Well, any substance that is superconductive is completely diamagnetic; no lines of force enter it at all.

If the magnetic field is made strong enough, however, some lines of force eventually manage to penetrate the diamagnetic substance and when that disruption of perfection takes place, all other perfections, including superconductivity, vanish. (It is odd to speak of perfection in nature. Usually perfections are the dreams of the theorist; the perfect gas, the perfect vacuum and so on. It is only at liquid helium temperatures that true perfection seems to enter the world of reality; hence, the title of this piece.)

The phenomenon of superconductivity has allowed the invention of a tiny device that can act as a switch. In simplest form, it consists of a small wire of tantalum, wrapped about a wire of niobium. If the wires are dipped in liquid helium so that the niobium wire is superconductive, a tiny current passed through it will remain indefinitely, until another current is sent through the tantalum wire. The magnetic field set up in the second case, disrupts the superconductivity and stops the current in the niobium.

Properly manipulated, such a "cryotron" can be used to replace vacuum tubes or transistors. Tiny devices consisting of grouped wires, astutely arranged, can replace large numbers of bulky tubes or moderately bulky transistors, so that a giant computing machine of the future may well be desk-size or less if it is entirely "cryotronized."

The only catch is that for such a cryotronized computer to work, it must be dipped wholly into liquid helium. The liquid helium will be

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vaporizing continually so that each computer will, under these conditions, act as an eternally continuing drain on earth's helium supply.

Which brings up the question, of course, whether we have enough helium on earth to support a society in which helium-dipped computers are common.

The main and, in fact, only commercial source of the inert gases other than helium is the atmosphere, which contains in parts per million, by weight:

| | |
|---|---|
| argon | 12,800 |
| neon | 12.5 |
| krypton | 2.9 |
| helium | 0.72 |
| xenon | 0.36 |
| radon | (trace) |

This means that the total atmospheric content of helium is 4½ billion tons; which seems a nice tidy sum until you remember how extravagantly that weight of gas is diluted with oxygen and nitrogen. Helium can be obtained from liquid air, but only at back-breaking expense.

(I would like to interrupt myself here to say that atmospheric helium consists almost entirely of the single isotope, helium-4. However, traces of the stable isotope, helium-3, are formed by the breakdown of radioactive hydrogen-3, which is, in turn, formed by the cosmic-ray bombardment of the atmosphere. Pure helium-3 has been studied and found to have a liquefaction point of only 3.2° K, a full degree lower than that of ordinary helium. However, helium-3 does not form the equivalent of the superfluid Helium II. Only one atom of atmospheric helium per million is helium-3, so that the entire atmospheric supply amounts to only about 45,000 tons. Helium-3 is probably the rarest of all the stable isotopes here on earth.)

But helium, at least, is found in the soil as well as in the atmosphere. Uranium and thorium give off alpha particles, which are the nuclei of helium atoms. For billions of years therefore, helium has been slowly collecting in the earth's crust (and remember that helium was first discovered on earth in uranium ore and not in the atmosphere). The earth's crust is estimated to contain helium to the extent of about 0.003 parts per million by weight. This means that the supply of helium in the crust is about twenty million times the supply in the atmosphere, but the dilution in the crust is nevertheless even greater than in the atmosphere.

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However, helium is a gas. It collects in crevices and crannies and can come boiling up out of the earth under the right conditions. In the United States, particularly, wells of natural gas often carry helium to the extent of 1 percent, sometimes to an extent of up to 8 or even 10 percent.

However, natural gas is a highly temporary resource which we are consuming rapidly. When the gas wells peter out, so will the helium, with the only remaining supply to be found in great dilution in the atmosphere or in even greater dilution in the soil.

It is possible to imagine, then, a computerized society of the future down to its last few million cubic feet of easily-obtainable helium. What next? Scrabble for the traces in air and soil? Make do with liquid hydrogen? Abandon cryotronized computers and try to return to the giant inefficient machines of the past. Allow the culture, completely dependent on computers, to collapse?

I've been thinking about this, since, as far as I know, it is an angle that has never been dealt with in science fiction.

And here is the result of my thinking.

Such a threatened society ought to have developed space travel—why not?—so that they need not seek for helium only here on Earth.

Of course, the biggest source of helium in the Solar system is the Sun, but I see no way of snaking helium out of the Sun in the forseeable future.

The next biggest source of helium is Jupiter, which has an atmosphere that is probably thousands of miles deep, terrifically dense, and which is perhaps ⅓ helium by volume (more than that by weight). Milking Jupiter for helium doesn't sound easy, either, but it is conceivable.

Suppose mankind could establish a base on Jupiter V, Jupiter's innermost satellite. We would then be circling a mere 70,000 miles above the visible surface of Jupiter (which is actually the upper reaches of its atmosphere). Considerable quantities of helium-loaded gas must float even higher above Jupiter than that (and therefore closer to Jupiter V).

I can imagine a fleet of unmanned ships leaving Jupiter V in a probing orbit that will carry them down toward Jupiter's surface and back, collecting and compressing gas as they go. Such gas will be easy to separate into its components and the helium can be liquefied far more easily out on Jupiter V than here on Earth, considering that the temperature is lower to begin with out there.

Uncounted tons of helium may prove easy to collect, liquefy and

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store. The next logical step would be to refrain from shipping that precious stuff anywhere else, even to Earth. Why expend the energy and why undergo the tremendous losses that would be unavoidable in transit?

Instead, why not build the computers right there on Jupiter V?

And that is the vision I have, the one I mentioned at the start of the article. It is the vision of Jupiter V—of all places—as the nerve center of the Solar system and, eventually, of the Galactic Empire; the brain of the Universe. I see this small world, a hundred miles in diameter, extracting its needed helium from the bloated world it circles and slowly being converted into one large mass of interlocking computers, swimming in the most unusual liquid that ever existed.

However, I don't think I'll have the luck of Janssen and Lockyer. Call me a pessimist, if you wish, but somehow I don't think I'll live to see this.

On the other hand, F&SF may live to see it (if it lives as long as I want it to) and perhaps someday some Kindly Editor of the far distant future, leafing back through crumbling issues of the far distant past, may find this article, and reprint it as an example of amazing prescience. . . .


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# BOOKS

THE SARAGOSSA MANUSCRIPT, *Jan Potocki, Orion Press, $5.00*

FIRST MEN TO THE MOON, *Wernher von Braun, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, $3.95*

WHEN THE KISSING HAD TO STOP, *Constantine Fitzgibbon, W. W. Norton, $3.95*

BEYOND, *Theodore Sturgeon, Avon, 35¢*

NOTIONS: UNLIMITED, *Robert Sheckley, Bantam, 35¢*

NINE TOMORROWS, *Isaac Asimov, Bantam, 35¢*

THE GENETIC GENERAL, *Gordon R. Dickson, Ace, 35¢*

WE HAVE NOT been a fan of THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS since a knowledgeable English instructor touted us onto Firdousi's SHAHNAMA, the original source from which the more famous collection was swiped. The earlier the work, the more power and punch it packs. Such is the case with THE SARAGOSSA MANUSCRIPT by Jan Potocki, an early and feverish collection of weird tales.

Potocki (pronounced Pototski) was a late XVIIIth century Polish nobleman, historian, archaeologist and ethnologist who created this collection of tales in the Scheherezade-Decameron manner. The stories deal with haunted inns and castles, forest chapels, execution grounds, lust, revenge, the clash of Christian and Moslem, cabalists and devils. They bring to mind the tales of Washington Irving and Nathaniel Hawthorne, but with what a difference! These are the more original, the more frank, the more lusty.

Potocki was a gentleman who appreciated the fine arts. Many of his passages are jewelled descriptions of painting, sculpture, furniture and decoration. But he was also ethnologist enough not to fear sensuality and savagery. His erotic passages are enough to raise eyebrows today, and his itemizations of the tortures of the inquisition and the persecutions of fiends will chill the blood of the most blasé.

Potocki never finished the book (he committed suicide in 1815), and this is a sad disappointment. His old-fashioned style of the story-



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within-the-story-within-the-story is irritating to modern taste, but this is a rich and riotous collection, crisply translated by Elizabeth Abbott, and a must for any lover of the bizarre.

In THE FIRST MEN TO THE MOON, Wernher von Braun, the great German Daddy of American rocketry, demonstrates one of the reasons why professional science fiction authors have lost some of their hold on the public today. Herr von Braun is no novelist, and knows it. He attempts the bare minimum in characterization, conflict and suspense in this simple saga of the first manned rocket flight to the moon.

But he rubricates his story with such wealth of factual detail in text, footnotes, marginal notes, end-papers and captions, that he has produced a book far more fascinating than a genuine work of fiction. The mere facts are romantic in themselves, and when they come from the horse's mouth with the cachet of authority, they're irresistible. The authors who write about spacemen are being put out of business by the spacemen who have taken to authorship.

The illustrations and diagrams are beautifully drawn by Fred Freeman. FIRST MEN TO THE MOON will captivate anyone aware of the Space Age. We recommend it as a gift for any bright boy, regardless of his years. . . .

One of the advantages of American ex-patriots living in England is the fact that they write with the best qualities of both cultures, as Mr. Constantine Fitzgibbon has done in WHEN THE KISSING HAD TO STOP. This is a novel about the fall of England as a result of internal confusion and Soviet machinations. It takes place just a year or two in the future . . . Mr. Fitzgibbon mentions a Triumph TR-6, and describes the Don Juan Club which advertises: *Dance with Naked Lovelies.*

In a quiet, unmelodramatic style, the author blueprints the passing of England behind the Iron Curtain, and each imaginary step is patterned on a real event that has actually taken place in Europe. But Mr. Fitzgibbon does not make the mistake of writing a political diatribe. He sees the tragedy through the eyes of the human actors who participate: Patrick, Earl of Clonard, a London advertising agency man; actress Nora May, his mistress; Rupert Page-Gorman, politically precocious and sexually arrested; Felix Seligman, Jew turned Catholic, who, incidentally, provides what little hope one can glean from this dark novel.

Do not be deceived by Mr. Fitzgibbon's suavity. This book has a tremendous delayed impact which will at first depress you, and then inspire you to read the political pages of your newspaper more carefully.

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This department devoutly believes that Theodore Sturgeon is too fine a writer to devote himself to science fiction exclusively. Certainly he is one of the greatest of the living science fiction authors, and we always welcome his books. His latest is BEYOND, a collection of short stories, some new, some reprints, all put together with Mr. Sturgeon's unique magic.

"Need" is a novelette about a strange and savage little freak who is acutely sensitive to the needs of humanity around him; and Mr. Sturgeon makes a nice distinction between needing and wanting. "Nightmare Island" is a lighthearted trifle in the style of the 1930s; a drunken sailor marooned, talking plants, etc. In "Largo" Mr. Sturgeon deals with one of his specialties, the half-genius, half-moron artist in love. "Like Young" is another last-men-on-earth story with a fillip of typical Sturgeonesque irony.

Perhaps these descriptions have indicated what we dread reporting for fear of sacrilege. The collection is not up to the godlike Mr. Sturgeon's usual standard. True, most any other author would have been proud to have written it, but Mr. Sturgeon is not just any other author. We permit him this one lapse, and no more.

Robert Sheckley is, without doubt, the most sophisticated and finished performer in science fiction, as he proves again with NOTIONS: UNLIMITED, a collection of one dozen sparkling stories. Whenever Mr. Sheckley appears on stage, we settle back comfortably, confident that this precise craftsman will make his flawless points with a minimum of fuss and a maximum of brilliance.

"The Language of Love" is the witty story of a serious young man seeking ultimate precision in the expression of his emotions. "The Native Problem" is the history of an ultra-civilized youth who wakes up one morning to discover that he's a blood-thirsty barbarian. "Morning After" is a scintillating pastiche based on electoral corruption. "Feeding Time" is a delicious spoof of demonology and devil-lore. There are eight more, all perfect.

Our admiration for Mr. Sheckley is so profound that we regret his publication in soft-cover. He deserves fine binding and an honored place on all book shelves.

Isaac Asimov, a giant in science fiction, gives us NINE TOMORROWS, a collection of stories garnered mostly from the pages of . . . shall we say . . . the lesser science fiction publications. All authors fail occasionally to bring off stories at their usual level of accomplishment. These they either destroy, cannibalize, or sell to less demanding markets. Mr. Asimov has done the latter with his discards, and now collected them.

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A few fight for life: *The Ugly Little Boy,* the story of a Neanderthal child wrenched out of time; *All The Troubles Of The World,* the story of a confused computer; and *Profession,* a long novelette about the feeble-minded. But we regret the others, and we deplore Mr. Asimov's prologue and epilogue in what, for lack of a better expression, must be called verse. They give the impression that he has become carelessly familiar with his public and his craft.

One note to Mr. Asimov's publishers: It's exasperating for the reader when the runninghead at the top of each page is the title of the book rather than of the story.

And last, Gordon R. Dickson's THE GENETIC GENERAL, a swinging piece of space-opera. We enjoy space-opera in moderate, well-written doses, which is exactly what Mr. Dickson provides . . . the story of the rise to apotheosis of a professional soldier in a galaxy in which each planet produces specialists of one sort or another. The novel is complete with Machiavellian villain, battle scenes, and lovely heroine who persists in misunderstanding the hero. All most satisfying.

But one beef to Mr. Dickson's publishers: Dear Ace Double Novel Books, *must* you stack the cards against an author with such 1920 pulp-magazine covers? Other reprint houses don't. Must *you,* dear Ace Double Novel Books?

—Alfred Bester

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*When last we heard, Mack Reynolds was making his home in Morocco; such are his restless habits, however, that his home now may be in Ibiza or Phnom Penh, Yemen or Yap. Recently, he made a trip behind the Iron Curtain, and the result has been a group of stories about Russia in the world of today and tomorrow. The present intriguing example concerns a possible future Russia free of both insecurity and hostility—and the subtle threat that condition poses to the rest of the world.*

# RUSSKIES GO HOME!

***by Mack Reynolds***

MIKE EDWARDS PLOWED HIS way through the sand as quickly as he could to the Russian party. "Just a minute, Miss," he called out in Russian. "Just a minute!"

One of the girls, the attractive one, had come onto the beach in a robe, one of the flamboyant new textiles the Russkies were producing. It was when she had slipped out of it that Mike's eyes had popped. Her tiny trunks left little to the imagination, but that wasn't it. She wore no top at all.

Surfeited with womanhood as Mike was in season, he still had to admit that she made a striking appearance indeed, not too big, not too small, and youthfully firm. But this was Spain!

He came closer, said apologetically, "Look here, Miss . . ."

She was frowning questioningly at him. "Saratov," she said. "Catherina Saratov."

He placed her vaguely. They had sat at the same table at a Horizonal Holidays party the other night. He'd thought even then that she was the epitome of Slavic beauty. Blonde, fair skinned, impossibly blue eyed, but without the heft of the average Russkie.

Mike said, "Look, this is Spain. Catholic, you know, and very conservative."

"Oh," she said. "You mean my bathing suit."

"Well, yes. It's very pretty, of course. Very chic, but . . ." he let his sentence dribble away, tried to keep from letting his eyes leave



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her face. Decided it was obvious that he was doing so and did a fair job of blushing. What was the old term? She was really stacked.

Catherina Saratov said, "But everybody wears this type of suit on the Crimea beaches now."

"I'm sure," Mike said. "But this is Torremolinos and the Spanish authorities are very conservative. It's part of their religion."

"Oh, well, of course," she said. "If it's their religion. One mustn't ignore religious customs in a foreign country. It would be uncultured." She took up a table napkin, did some things with it deftly and wrapped it about her upper body. "Religious customs are fascinating.

Mike sighed, cleared his throat and said, "Sorry to bother you, Miss Saratov. How are you and your party enjoying yourselves?"

The other Russkies had been busy with their own beach preparations. Now one of them, a beefy forty year old who looked as though he'd already had half a dozen drinks today, came up. He introduced himself as Nicholas Galushko and shook hands—they always shook hands.

He said to Mike complainingly, "It's too hot. Why aren't the beaches here air conditioned? In the Black Sea resorts, all the beaches are air conditioned. In your advertisements in *Pravda* you didn't mention that the beaches weren't air conditioned."

"Well," Mike said. "That's the way it goes. Some countries haven't got to the point of air conditioning beaches yet. That's the reason some people come to Spain, to see things the way they were in the old days."

One of the other Russkies, a stocky woman in her mid-thirties, came up and shook hands with Mike and introduced herself as Ana Chekova before getting in on the complaints. "All of our beaches are air-conditioned, and up on the Arctic Ocean the beaches in Siberia are warmed and ultra-violet rayed."

Mike inwardly winced at the implications there but continued his genial smile. "I'd like to visit the Soviet Complex some day," he said.

"Why don't you?" Catherina smiled at him. "You've heard about the new policy for foreign tourism, haven't you? It's free."

"Free?" Mike said blankly.

She nodded. "You have to pay your expenses up to the border, of course, but once in the Complex all costs are borne by the State. It's for good will."

For a moment Mike let his mind reel with the implications. Its effect on such companies as his employers, Horizonal Holidays. But then he decided he'd better leave it for a more tranquil moment—sometime, perhaps, when he was safely in bed and it could drive him to insomnia.

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Galushko had popped open a bottle of the Spanish champagne they'd brought in their portable refrigerator and was pouring a glass. He sipped it, made a face. "Not up to our Armenian champagne," he scowled. He looked accusingly at Mike. "This Spanish champagne is second rate. Not sweet enough."

Mike said, "Well, that's the way it goes. Different countries, different tastes. Most of the Western countries like their champagne *brut.*"

"Dry champagne," Galushko scoffed. "No taste!"

Mike said hopefully, "Well, if you'll excuse me."

"Oh, have a glass of wine," the Russkie said overbearingly.

"Well, I don't like to start drinking until after lunch at least. Hard day in front of me, you know."

"Oh, come on. Drink! Enjoy yourself. Life is short. And what is better than food and drink? Here try this. Caviar from the Caspian. Real caviar! Not the mush you Westerners eat." He pushed a still foaming glass of wine into Mike's right hand, pressed a large chunk of bread deeply covered with caviar into his left.

*Here we go again,* Mike sighed inwardly.

However, Catherina Saratov smiled at him and that was something. In fact, he could feel her smile go deep down within. Something he hadn't thought possible in mid tourist season.

Mike Edwards made his way to the Espadon Hotel that afternoon to line up some of his clients for a side trip to Granada and the sightseeing tour through the Alhambra. He was still slightly light headed from the unaccustomed drinking of the cold champagne under the broiling Spanish sun. He'd got away after three glasses, about par for the course when a Russkie caught you.

He stopped off at the bar for a Fernet Branca to settle his stomach.

On the stool next to him sat another of his clients and Mike prayed inwardly and hopelessly that the other would leave him alone.

The other said, "How's it going, Mr. Edwards?"

Mike said, "Just fine. Lovely weather, isn't it?"

The other said, "You've probably forgotten my name. I'm Frank Jones."

"Of course not," Mike lied. "You came on the plane last Friday. How do you like Torremolinos?" Actually, he did remember Mr. Jones although not by name. The man stood out because of his lack of typicalness. The other tourists came in sportswear, most of them bearing cameras, skin diving apparatus and such. Mr. Jones had landed in a business suit, in which he was at present sweltering, and was looking glum even as vacationists went.

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Two or three of the Russkies were taking shots in the patio-lounge with their 3-D cameras. Regardless of country, the tourist is a snap-shot taker, but no nationality on earth had ever equalled the Russkies.

Just to be saying something, Mike said, "I wonder why none of the Western countries have ever gone into producing 3-D cameras."

Frank Jones snorted his indignation. "How? With the Russkies flooding the market with their product at five dollars per camera, retail, how would a Western company ever get going? That Mikoyan Camera works up in Leningrad has a capacity as great as all other camera factories in the world. All automated, of course. I understand less than a hundred men are employed in the place. Basically it turns out cameras for the Complex countries, but when the Kremlin decides it needs some foreign exchange, they dump a couple of hundred million cameras on the world market at cutthroat prices."

"I guess you're right," Mike said. "Where will it end? They're selling aircushion cars all over Europe for less than two hundred dollars. Of course," he said loyally, "I don't think they're up to the Ford-Chevrolet Company cars, but . . ."

"But two hundred bucks is a far cry from two thousand," Jones finished.

"It piles up," Mike agreed.

"Same deal as with the cameras," Jones pursued. "Back in the 1950s the Russkies didn't turn out more than a few thousand automobiles a year. They were interested in building more steel mills, more basic industry. But when they got to the point where they were producing all the steel they wanted, in the late 1960s, they built an automated plant in Sverdlovak that dwarfed anything the rest of the world had ever seen."

Mike shifted uncomfortably on his stool, but he couldn't leave in the middle of the other's conversation. He didn't particularly go in for such subjects these days. People came down here to relax, not to dwell on the ulcer breeding economic problems of the world.

Jones was saying, "Not an obsolete piece of machinery in the plant. No worry about competition, either. A captive market of a billion people. No need to change designs every year to attract buyers. Fifteen million cars a year capacity. No wonder they can afford to sell them for two hundred dollars."

Catherina Saratov came strolling into the patio-lounge done up in the latest from the style center, Leningrad, the shimmering disposable material now being turned out by the billions of yards. Mike watched her cross the room. It hit him all over again. Holy Smokes, but the girl was attractive. He felt a stirring within him.

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Next day Mike Edwards was scheduled to take a party to Malaga, eight miles north of Torremolinos, for a bullfight. It was in the way of something special. The aging Manola Segura had come out of retirement for the third time and was having a series of *mano a mano* corridas with Carlos Arruza 3rd.

Mike's party consisted of seventy Horizonal Holidays tourists, sixty-five of them Russkies. The road to Malaga was packed with cars and buses coming up from not only Torremolinos but Marbella, Estepona and probably from as far as Gibraltar. Even had there been more than a handful of Spanish *aficionados* who could afford the admission price, it looked improbable that they could have found seats in the bull plaza.

The Russkies, as usual, were jubilant. Even on the way into town in the bus the bubbling wine bottles went from hand to hand, laughter and jibes filled the interior.

Mike stood, up next to the driver. He'd tried to wiggle into the seat next to Catherina Saratov but had missed out to a hulking six and a half footer who looked more like a Turk than a Slav. A real brawny specimen, he must have gone over 250 pounds. Now he had a magnum of champagne in one hand, a pair of castanets, which were dwarfed in his monstrous paw, in the other. He was regaling one and all with a Russianized version of gypsy flamenco.

One of the Russkies leaned far out a window and pointed excitedly. "Look, a car with wheels. Four wheels. How quaint. Look everybody!"

Mike closed his eyes in pain.

Ana Chekova, the woman who'd been with Catherina on the beach the day before, demanded of Mike, "Why do they still use land cars here? In the Complex everyone uses aircushion cars. Much more comfortable. It's ridiculous to use wheel cars."

Mike cleared his throat. "Well, in some countries they haven't got around yet to acquiring aircushion cars the way you have in the Complex. In fact, some people prefer them, in a way."

"Ha!" Ana Chekova snorted.

Mike shrugged. It was a Russkie characteristic that they couldn't believe everybody wouldn't adopt each and every Russian gadget given the chance.

When he'd first come to Spain Mike Edwards had rather liked the bull fight. In theory, he was morally opposed to it. In practice it gave him a vicarious thrill he'd never found in any spectator sport. Since the coming of the Russkie tourist wave, however, something was lost. The pageant, the excitement of the knowledgeable aficionado, the electric feeling of the *fiesta brava*. With the stands packed with first comers, more oc-

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cupied with their bottles and their 3-D cameras, and uncaring about the niceties of the spectacle going on below them, something went out of the whole thing.

Mike had it arranged this time. His seat was next to Catherina's and right at the edge of the barrera. As a matter of fact, he was rather keen to see this *mano a mano* competition between Segura and Arruza. But besides, he was trying to analyze this feeling he'd developed for the Russkie girl. This was new—especially in season. He grinned wryly to himself. Was it because she was such an exception? A girl who wasn't wildly pursuing, rather than waiting to be pursued. There was a preponderance of female over male tourists of two to one in Torremolinos and usually it was all a thirty-three year old tourist agent could do to fight them off.

The bugle blew and the paseo began. The two matadors, followed by their cuadrillas, paraded across the ring toward the judge's box. The crowd cheered.

Catherina Saratov said to him, "Actually, a very uncultured sport, this bull baiting. Is it allowed in England as well?"

Mike said, "Well, I don't believe so. I'm an American, you know, not British."

"An American." She stared at him, fascinated. She leaned forward and said, "Do you mind if I ask you a question?"

"Of course not." Mike was disconcerted. Not only because of her sudden eagerness as she leaned forward toward him, but due to the fact that this dress was almost as revealing as her beach costume.

Catherina said, with a certain horrified fascination, "Have you ever lynched a Negro?"

He might have known that was coming. He got it with every contingent of Russkies that came through. Mike said, "Well, no. Our authorities take a very dim view of such activities. I'm from New Mexico, myself. I doubt if anybody's been lynched there since the days of Billy the Kid."

He decided to go a bit further than usual in his capacity as Horizonal Holidays tour manager. "Have you ever been purged?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Well, I understand that Russians think American spend half their time lynching each other. On the other hand, the idea in the States is that the Russian national sport is purging."

"Purging?" Catherina said. "I don't believe I understand." Then, "Oh, purging. You mean back in the 1930s between Stalin and the Old Bolsheviks."

Mike said dryly, "Well, that wasn't exactly the last time you had a political purge."

Catherina shrugged her shoulders and her attention went back to the ring where Manola Segura was waiting for his first bull.

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She said, "In the early days when the Soviets were still poor, everybody fought to get to the top. Only the higher bureaucrats and a few others were able to live well. But as production developed the competition to rise above everyone else slackened off. Finally, for decades now, there is an abundance of everything. So we no longer need fight among ourselves."

Manola Segura's peones were running the bull, dragging their capes behind them, letting the animal chase them to the burladero shelters. Their matador watched warily, noting how *el toro* hooked.

Mike Edwards had to tear his eyes away from the girl. It was a more sensible answer than he had expected after she'd pulled that old wheeze about lynching.

Manola came out now and went through a series of half a dozen verónicas with the bull. Very passable verónicas they were too, a Segura specialty. From the few Spaniards in the tendidos came a scattering of *olés*. The Russkies weren't particularly impressed.

The bugle sounded and Manola Segura retreated as the picadores emerged for the second act of the production, the *Tercio de Varas*.

"Those bulls are not so very large," Nick Galushko growled. He was seated directly behind them.

Mike said agreeably, "Well, they aren't as big as they were in the old days, but I still wouldn't want to be down there."

Catherina said, "Very uncultured."

Somebody from above passed down a half empty but still chill bottle of champagne. Catherina took a short swallow, passed the bottle to Mike. He didn't particularly want it but then he took the opportunity to make a bond between them even though it was as small as a shared drink. What in the world of what was getting into him with this Russkie wench?

The Spanish were yelling "Olé, olé." Manola had performed a particularly well done *quite*.

The bugle sounded and the fight entered the *Tercio de banderillas*. In his youth Manola Segura had often placed his own, but today he sent out his peones for the job.

He did his best work in the *Tercio de Muerte*. No one in Spain was better with the muleta and sword than old Manola Segura and he knew it. He went through a veritable tour de force in his faena winding up with two or three Manoletinas.

A few spectators who appreciated what was going on, dissolved into loud olés and after a perfect kill, Manola was awarded two ears and a tail. He paraded the ring, holding them up for the crowd's approval. The Spanish cheered and so did the few foreigners present who had a working knowledge of the *fiesta brava*. The Russkies cheered too, waved their bottles at Manola as he went by and snapped

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desperately with their 3-D cameras.

Catherina frowned at Mike who had been beating his hands together and making with the olés as fervently as any. "How can you applaud such primitive bull baiting?"

Mike knocked it off and said mildly, "Well, it was possibly the best fight I've seen in three years."

"Uncultured," Catherina said disapprovingly.

The bugle sounded and Carlos Arruza's first bull came exploding from the toril doors.

"A calf!" Nick Galushko muttered from behind them.

Mike said over his shoulder, "That's a three year old *bos taurus ibericus*, Mr. Galushko. Specially bred for fighting for a thousand years."

"Ha! You should see our range cattle in the Kazakh People's Republic. Then you would see *bulls*."

"Well," Mike said agreeably, "I'm sure you have some king-size bulls in Siberia all right."

The peones were running Arruza's animal for him, making the burladeros in the nick of time.

Mike shot to his feet suddenly, "Holy Smokes," he snapped. "What's he doing?"

The oversized Russkie who had sat next to Catherina on the bus was climbing over the barrera, down into the ring, a bottle of champagne in one hand, a wide grin on his face.

One of the Spaniards seated to Mike's right gasped, "An *espontáneo!*"

The Russkie reeled across the ring in the direction of the bull who seemed somewhat taken aback by this new invasion.

Mike shot an agonized look in the direction of the barrera where the matadors and their assistants were sheltered. No aid seemed to be coming from that direction. "Can't somebody do something!" he yelled.

Nick Galushko was laughing hugely. "Sit down. Have another drink. Vova's all right, He's a Cossack."

"I don't care if he's Rasputin," Mike snapped. "He's drunk and that's a fighting bull."

The rest of the Russkies were cheering and laughing, urging their half drunken compatriot onward.

Catherina said unworriedly, "Don't mind about Vova. He's a cattleman from Kazakh. He knows all about cattle. Besides, he's a great wrestler—Turkoman style. Look at the size of him."

Galushko tried to press a bottle of vodka into Mike's hand. "Nothing can hurt Vova. He's a monster."

The bull was charging. Mike tried to close his eyes. Had to open them again in fascination.

The gigantic Cossack stood, his feet poised for a moment. Just before impact, he spun away, lithe

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in spite of his size. The bull wheeled, somewhat in the same manner as when the banderilleros were placing their darts. It turned too sharply, pulled itself into an awkward position.

The Cossack stepped closer, the heavy champagne bottle held by the neck. He brought it down in a crushing blow behind the bull's ear. The animal, dazed, stumbled forward two or three steps and then sank to its knees, where it continued to shake its head.

The Russians throughout the arena roared with laughter.

Vova grinned widely, put one foot on the bull's back and waved in drunken triumph to his supporters. He left the bull and began touring the ring as Manola Segura had done with his two ears and tail. As he went the Russkies cheered thunderously, interspacing their version of olés with raucous laughter.

Vova passed the barrera where Manola Segura and Carlos Arruza stood dressed in their highly decorative *trajes de luces,* for a score of generations the multicolored traditional dress of the matador. He put his thumb to his nose and made an internationally recognizable gesture.

The crowd roared again.

Except for the Spanish who remained quiet. Unsmiling.

Mike would have liked to have eaten alone that evening but it wasn't in the cards. He had to make his rounds of the hotels, listen to the complaints. Try to soothe relationships between tourists and hotel managers. One of the big beefs about the Russkies was the fact that they seldom stayed put in the rooms assigned them. If the French had formerly had a reputation for promiscuity, it was nothing to this. During a two week vacation period a Russkie wench might occupy as many as half a dozen rooms, spreading her favors about with true communistic sharing of the bounty.

Tonight it was the Santa Clara. He was lucky enough to draw a table with only one other person, a Russian from Kiev and an unusually mild one at that. Mike remembered him vaguely, automatically asked him how things were going and to his surprise got no complaints. Mike was mollified. He seldom thought in terms of his tourists being happy about their Torremolinos stay.

However, it couldn't last. During the fish course, *calamares en su tinta,* the Russkie said, "I understand you are an American, Mr. Edwards. You speak our language very well."

"I took a course at the University in New Mexico. All the American schools teach Russian now."

The Russian said, "How are things in America? I understand that with the current, ah, recession unemployment is severe."

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"Terrible," Mike nodded. "I'd estimate a third of the working force back home is unemployed."

"A third!" The Russian was shocked. "The starvation must be terrible."

"Starvation?" Mike said. Then he remembered he'd run into this discussion before too. "No," he said. "You Russkies, pardon me, Russians, seem to think that because there are millions unemployed in the States they're all starving. Actually, some of them have never had it so good."

The Russian looked blank.

Mike said, "Listen, even back in the 1930s depression the American standard of living as compared to the rest of the world was fabulous. You've got to realize that the Soviet Complex didn't invent the production of abundance. We Americans did. We've had it for half a century. Right now, it's driving us batty. We don't know how to control it."

The Russian began, "But I've always been led to believe that it was the Seven Year Plan started in 1959 that first developed . . ."

Mike was waggling a finger negatively. "No sir. If you insist I might go along with you on Ivan Ivanovitch somebody or other inventing the steamboat or Georgi Georgiovitch flying an airplane before the Wright brothers. However, I will not retreat an inch on the fact that we Americans first developed the production of superabundance. I'll also admit that we still have to figure out what to do with it—but we were the first. You Russians have it too, now, but we were fanny deep in agricultural surpluses, for instance, while you people were still eating black bread and cabbage in the way of diet."

"But the unemployed. You just admitted . . ."

"Yeah," Mike said. "The unemployed. Do you think any office holder in the States would remain there overnight if he voted for anything that involved *not* taking care of the unemployed? Once a month, at least, every politician in the country gets up on his hind legs and gives a blistering attack against the trend toward the Welfare State. It's expected of him, like speaking against sin and for mother. Then he goes back to his seat in Congress and votes another increase in unemployment insurance and every pension and veteran's bonus in sight."

The Russian was taken aback.

Mike snorted. "I know at least a couple of dozen young men back home who have never had a job in their lives. They live in suburban homes, drive their own cars. What's more," he added glumly, "the way things look they never *will* hold down a job. The new leisure class. With the advances in technology, it looks as though the United States will have another

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half million unemployed this year to add to last year's total."

The Russian said, "Well, why are you here? Why don't you go home and get a job being unemployed?"

"Damn it!" Mike roared. "Because I'm in revolt. I think people *ought* to work, if it's only a job listening to the silly complaints of tourists. The world may get to where technology throws ninety-nine men out of a hundred out of work, but I'll find something to do if it kills me!"

"I'm a doctor," the Russian said soothingly. "If it affects you this strongly, it might."

"Might what?" Mike said more calmly.

"Might kill you. You'll have a stroke. How about another vodka?"

"No thanks," Mike said. "I'm sorry, Doctor. I've had a hard day and that's my particular sore spot."

Mike Edwards wasn't making the progress he'd like with Catherina. He didn't know why. He was so used to having women tourists fall all over him that it was hard to accept one who responded not at all. He spent his spare time hanging around the Espadon Hotel where she was quartered for her Horizonal Holidays vacation.

It was there, in the bar, that he ran into Frank Jones again. By this time the other had acquired a sport shirt and had shed his suit coat, but he still didn't look like a typical Horizonal Holidays client.

Mike said, "How goes the vacation?"

Jones said, slowly as though searching for words, "Actually, Mr. Edwards, this isn't exactly a vacation for me."

"What is it then? Any way I can help?" He gave the patio-lounge a quick sweep with his eyes but there was no sign of Catherina.

Frank Jones said, "I was sent to see how you were getting along with the Russkie tourists."

That brought Mike's eyes back to the other in a hurry. "By whom? And why? Who cares, except Horizonal Holidays?"

Jones said quietly, "The North Atlantic Treaty Organization does."

"NATO?" Mike blurted. "Is NATO still in existence? What use is a military alliance in a world where any country, no matter how small, can destroy any other country, no matter how large?"

"I know," Jones said. "When every country on earth has H-Bombs and intercontinental rockets, they are all equal, militarily speaking, and no combination is any stronger than any individual nation. Actually, NATO isn't exactly a military alliance any longer. It has—evolved. It's more of an organization on the part of North America and Western Europe to, well, *control* the Soviet Complex in the realm of international trade."

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Mike was scowling at him. "But why the interest in me? I'm just one of half a hundred Horizonal Holidays representatives."

Jones poured the rest of his beer into his glass. "You're also Michael J. Edwards, the youngest man ever to take the degree of Academician in an American university and you took it in political economy."

Mike snorted. "Which didn't keep me from going out on my neck when my department was automated five years ago."

The other was shaking his head. "*You* wouldn't have gone out. A couple of dozen men under you would have been displaced is all. As I understand it, you resigned in protest at their dismissal."

Mike shrugged. "I'm not opposed to automation in industry or anywhere it saves drudgery, but I don't believe in it in the arts and certainly not in education. TV has its place but political economy shouldn't be taught to ten million students at once by some joker sitting before a camera. A few decades of that and you'll have everybody in the country with identical ideas."

He thought about it for a moment. "I suppose I'm in revolt against what's happening to the intellectual in America. With all the manpower available, I think we should put more people into education, science and the arts. I'm not a sulking expatriate. If I came up with an answer to the problems as I see them, I'd return to the States tomorrow and start fighting for the changes I thought necessary to bring her out of the current intellectual and economic rut. Meanwhile, while I'm thinking it out, I'll make my living some other way than in an education system I can't agree with. Just by chance, this is the job I fell into."

Jones seemed to switch subjects. He said, "Mr. Edwards, how would you sum up the world's current economic situation?"

Mike's eyes went around the lobby again. He wondered where Catherina could be. She should be coming in for dinner. Possibly she was off on one of the endless parties the Russkies were forever throwing. If that girl didn't look out she'd wind up a staggering alcoholic. He wondered who she was with. That big goof of a Cossack they called Vova? He felt an uncomfortable twang. Jealousy? Good grief. He just wasn't the type. And over, of all things, a Russkie tourist!

He brought his attention back to Jones. "Economic situation? Well, looking back it seems unbelievable that we didn't foresee it all. Industrial production, once you get beyond a certain take-off point, can be a geometric progression. You build one steel mill and with its product you can build two more, and with their product, four more, and so on. The Russkies

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had got to that basic point by 1955 and by 1960 they were fully under way. A planned economy; no depressions, no strikes, no unions to stand in the way of automation. They caught up to American gross national product shortly after 1970. Now they're *really* underway and the Chinese and the satellites with them."

Mike wound it up with, "Is that what you mean?"

Jones said, "As far as you go. I was dwelling on the international aspects."

Mike grunted. "That was our own fault. When we refused to trade with them we threw them back on their own resources. Pushed by necessity they made themselves self-sufficient. Now the Soviet Complex has no need for foreign trade. There's nothing we've got that they require."

"Nothing but one thing," Jones said quietly.

Mike scowled, not getting it. "What's the one thing?"

"Tourism. The Russians were penned up in their own borders for a couple of generations. Now that travel restrictions have been lifted and prosperity prevails, tourists are flowing out like water over a broken dam."

Mike shuddered. "You're telling me!" He brought himself back to the original subject. "What's this got to do with NATO and with me?"

"I'll tell you in a minute," Jones said. "Mr. Edwards, why is there currently a depression in the West?"

Mike said impatiently, "I sound as if I'm giving a course in freshman economics. Actually, we've never recovered from the ending of the cold war. We had a booming economy based considerably on defense production. When a workable peace was arrived at, that production fell off. In our economy, boom begets boom, but bust also begets bust. Once you start down hill, it's almost impossible to stop. Thus far, we've found nothing to start us booming again."

Jones was nodding. "But there's one point you've missed."

Still no signs of Catherina. The other Horizonal Holidays people were filing into the dining room, but there was no sign of Catherina. Confound it. He had several duties later tonight. He'd hoped to be able to have a cocktail or two with the girl.

Mike said, "Look, let's sit down and eat. I'll have to be going before too long."

They found a table for two and a waiter scurried up with a *lista de platos*. After they'd ordered, Mike said, "You were saying something about a point I missed."

"Yes," Jones pursued. "The reason why we've never got out of the rut."

"You tell me," Mike said, breaking up a bread roll.

"It's the Russkies. As you point-

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ed out, they're self-sufficient. They don't need international trade. They consume internally the full production of their industries."

"And," Mike prompted.

"Our economies, we of the West, are different. Our industries operate only so long as we can sell what they produce. Under free enterprise we roll along fine when there is demand for the product. Always in the past we were sparked into new booms by either war, preparation for war, or by foreign trade—by pumping our products overseas, developing new lands, creating new markets abroad."

Mike nodded. "I wouldn't put it quite that way, but go on."

"That's it, we can't go on," Jones said. "That's the problem. There are no wars any more, there can't be. And foreign trade? The Soviet Complex, in spite of the fact that it isn't interested in foreign commerce, itself, has for all practical purposes destroyed foreign trade for the rest of the world."

Mike said, "They have indeed. How can we sell typewriters in the Argentine when the Russkies come along and dump several ship loads of them into the country to retail for ten dollars?"

The NATO man leaned forward. "That's the point. If the Russkies don't need foreign trade to maintain a healthy economy, why do they bother to raise money by dumping?"

"Well," Mike said, "we've already covered that. They don't need our products but they do need foreign exchange for this fabulous tourist outpouring of theirs. Perhaps five million Russkies a year go down to the Argentine, so they need Argentine pesos to pay the tab. The same with every other country to which their tourists go. When you consider forty million Russkie rubbernecks a year, you realize they need *lots* of foreign exchange."

"So they dump," Jones said. "And seem to be going round and around. What has this got to do with NATO and above all with me?"

The other wound it all up. "To stimulate our economies again we've got to get back into international commerce on a large scale. As long as the Complex is dumping products at cut rates, we can't. And they won't stop as long as they need money for tourism. The answer? The only answer is to figure out some way of stopping the Russkie tourists from leaving home."

Mike blinked at him. "Stop them? How, for Heaven's sake! It's the damnedest phenomenon in the history of travel."

"Right. And with your background, both academic and as a working tourist representative handling the Russkies, one of the NATO bigwigs thought you might come up with some solution."

Mike leaned back in his chair and laughed. "So that's what we've

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been building up to for the past half hour."

"What's funny?"

Mike said, "My job is that of a tourist representative. Now you want me to figure out some impossible scheme which will drive my best customers back to their homeland."

Jones drummed a finger impatiently on the table top. "Good Lord, man, the economies of the whole West are at stake."

Mike said, "Well, frankly, I haven't any answer to your problem. In fact, by the looks of things, it's going to get worse, not better. Production still continues to grow in the Complex. Next year, Russkie vacations will probably be extended when they make cutbacks in the work week."

He spotted Catherina and her party coming in the door. Her blonde head was back and she was laughing exuberantly at something that had evidently transpired just before they entered the hotel. Vova, the big Cossack, had a guitar and was rendering a Spanish flamenco piece. To render means to tear apart.

Just seeing her tightened Mike's throat.

"Pardon me," he said to Jones, "I'll have to go over and . . . well, sort of check with those people. See if everything is going all right."

Jones looked over at the new arrivals. "They look as though they're going fine. They're already walking two feet off the floor. If you improved things for them, they'd go through the roof."

Mike didn't even hear him.

Two evenings later, Mike Edwards was able to talk a dozen of the Russkie vacationists into a tapa tour of Malaga. Actually, he hadn't been stressing the tapa tour this season. He'd had disastrous luck with the Russkies who took it.

The tapa tour consisted of pub-crawling about the bodegas of Malaga and there were a multitude of them. Tapa means free lunch, and the institution still reigned supreme in Spain. A Spaniard seldom took a drink without something to eat with it, a few shrimp, cheese and bread, french fried sardines, or whatever.

Mike's parties would wander up and down the old streets, stopping periodically to have a glass of Sherry here, a small beer there. This had been fine with the British and French, but the Russkies! Ah, the Russkies. They usually started off docile enough, having their copas of Sherry or Malaga muscatel, but invariably before the evening was over discipline melted away and the night could end on any note, usually noisy and calamitous.

But this was his chance to get Catherina more or less to himself. At least he'd have lots of opportunity to talk to her.

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They started with small glasses of *fino* at Vincente's and the tapa was *gambas pil pil* a manner of serving shrimp in a sizzling sauce of butter, garlic and red peppers. This made hit enough with Nick Galushko and the others that they had to repeat the performance several times. Mike managed to get Catherina off at a table to themselves.

He came quickly to the point. "Look, why don't you like me?"

Her eyes widened. "But I do. What do you mean, Mr. Edwards?"

"Look, call me Mike. You've been avoiding me. Every time I try to get you alone for a few minutes, you have some excuse."

She sipped her fino, looked at him over the edge of her glass. She said, "Actually, I like you very much, Mike. I always have since, well, since you blushed so hugely there on the beach when you told me about my bathing suit."

"Well, then, why . . . ?"

She put a hand on his arm. "To what end? Do you think my moral code is looser than that of your western girls? Admittedly, most of my compatriots are, shall we say, somewhat philosophical about sexual mores, but, I assure you, Mike, I'm not." She added, mischievously, "In spite of my bathing suit."

Mike flushed. "I'm sure your code is at least as high as mine."

"Very well. I leave in a few days. Just what sort of a relationship did you have in mind for us? A quick—what do you Americans call it?—a roll in the hay?"

It struck Mike like a blow. Actually, he hadn't figured it out at length. What *had* he in mind?

One of the Russkies was roaring questioningly at Mike whether or not they were to spend the rest of the evening here. He muttered something placating, and took over his guiding duties. He led them down a block or two to the Allegro for draught beer and callos for tapa. Callos was a tripe dish.

He was thinking it over. Catherina was right. What had he in mind? Certainly not a vacation romance, ending for all time when her two weeks were up. Not with Catherina.

He waited for a break, while the Russkies were wolfing down their tapa, edged her to the side again. "You could stay on," he began feebly.

She laughed at him. "Mike, Mike. Eventually I'd have to go back to Moscow, to my job. I work at the Bolshi-Films as a production secretary. I like you. I could probably learn to like you very much more. I know it. But why hurt each other?"

Nick Galushko staggered from his place at the bar. He shouted to Catherina to come and try this wonderful new dish. "Do you know what it's made of?" His voice went sly. "I won't tell until you've tasted."

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Catherina laughed. "Tripe, you old glutton. You'd eat anything."

Nick wedged her back into the melee, leaving Mike standing alone.

The first germ of the idea began to hit him when they were passing the Cathedral on the way to Pepe's where the specialty was Valdepenas white wine with squid deep fried in olive oil for tapa. Mike was next to Catherina. She said, wonderingly, "Look how the Spanish do when they pass the church.

"What? Mike said.

"They make the sign of the cross. Isn't religion fascinating?"

One of the older Russians, heavyset with overeating and drinking, and now lurching from the evening's wine, said, "When I was a boy my grandmother used to go to church. It was very strange, but, you know—she seemed to like it. She had a very . . . strange look on her face when she returned from church each Sunday." He shook his head as though he hardly expected to be believed.

Catherina turned to Mike Edwards. "Why don't you make the sign of the cross when you pass the Cathedral? Aren't you religious? I thought all Westerners were religious."

"Who me?" Mike said. "Oh, sure." He didn't want to disillusion her. "Only I belong to a different church."

They were fascinated. "Religion is a thing of the past in the Complex," somebody said. "An interesting subject. Tell us about your beliefs. We promise, we won't laugh."

"Of course not," Catherina said. "It wouldn't be cultured."

Mike thought fast. The tour had hardly begun but already some of them were reeling. He could see what would develop. Somewhere along here one of them would shout for champagne, and then another would begin buying drinks for the Spanish customers in one of these bodegas, and before you knew it Mike would have a brawl on his hands. Even Catherina was beginning to show signs of being a bit high.

Mike said, "Well, we teach moderation."

Nick Galushko was charmed by the idea. "Moderation in what?"

"In all things. In eating, in drinking, in smoking. In all the animal pleasures."

Catherina said, "But what has that to do with religion? Do you know, you're the first *really* religious persons I've ever met."

Mike developed the point. "Well, the idea is that whoever or whatever created you—we're not fanatical about that phase of it—had no intention of you blunting your facilities by overindulgence in any way. Otherwise, why give you keen senses?"

"Why, that's wonderful," Catherina said. "So obvious."

Mike was doing rather well, he

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admitted to himself. He was a better evangelist than he'd ever thought. He elaborated on the theme, dragging from the depths of memory long neglected words of wisdom from the saints and the prophets of yesteryear.

He found himself sitting in Pepe's at a table, the Russkies standing around him listening, once in awhile injecting a word or question. He realized that they were eating it up. He threw in a bit of Zen Buddhism and some of the later Jewish prophets, and then gave them a précis of the Sermon on the Mount, not bothering to give a credit line to the Author.

Finally he stopped and said, "It just occurs to me why you're so fascinated. Religion is taboo in the Soviet Complex, isn't it?"

"Taboo?" somebody said.

"Forbidden. You're not allowed to go to church, to worship."

"Why not?" Catherina was perplexed.

"I don't know. That's what I've always understood."

"Oh," Galushko said. "That was in the old days. When the Bolsheviks overthrew the Czar the churches largely lined up with the old regime. So the Bolsheviks had to fight them. It doesn't make an difference now."

"Well then, why hasn't religion returned, if the authorities don't care?"

Nobody seemed to know the answer to that. "Maybe because there are no longer any churches, except museums. No longer any priests, or rabbis, or preachers. We read about them in school, but there are none. The whole thing never made much sense to me," Nick Galushko offered. "That is, of course, until hearing you talk tonight."

There was a murmur of assent from around the ring.

Mike cleared his throat. "Well, we'd better have our Valdepenas and then get on to the next place."

They hesitated. "You know," one of them said sheepishly, "I think I've had enough for tonight. What you've been saying about moderation. There's a great deal in that. I've been doing too much drinking, it spoils everything else. I don't even enjoy swimming in the morning."

Mike Edwards was stretched out on his bed, hands behind his head and staring unseeingly at the ceiling. He had a great deal to think about and the pressures of everyday work weren't conducive to thinking. There were one hell of a lot of ramifications . . .

There was a knock on the door of his small apartment. He growled something about tourists, brought his feet to the floor and went to answer the summons.

It was Frank Jones, the NATO man.

Mike said, "I was just thinking about you."

Jones said sourly, "We didn't

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exactly finish our conversation the other evening."

Mike led the way back to his tiny living-dining room, motioned to a chair near the table. He brought out a bottle of Fundador and a couple of small glasses, poured two drinks and left the bottle uncorked before them.

He said, "This dumping the Russkies are doing. Do you think it's a deliberate calculated campaign to undermine the West?"

"No." Jones shook his head. He took up his glass and sipped it. "You don't have beer, I suppose?"

"No. Spanish beer is awful. Why don't you?"

Jones shrugged. "They're no longer actively trying to propagandize their system. That's an early phase of revolution, when enthusiasms are young. Now that they've got luxury on a mass scale, they've become hedonistic. If other countries want to adopt the Russkie system, fine, but let them work it out themselves."

Mike thought it over. "Well, that covers one important phase of it."

The NATO man's eyes narrowed. "You think you've got something?"

"Maybe," Mike said. "What do you have in the way of resources to back a program on a large scale?"

"Almost anything, man. What's your plan?"

Mike made circles with his cognac glass on the table surface. "We're going to have to give the job to Madison avenue," he mused. "Remember a generation ago when the Russkies were first beginning to forge ahead and we were viewing-with-alarm the fact that their best brains were going into science and production and ours were going into advertising and sales?"

"What's that got to do with it?" Jones nervously poured another drink.

"We're going to give those bright young men of ours the job of putting over the softest sell of all time."

"Selling what!"

"Religion."

Jones couldn't have stared harder if Mike had suddenly sprouted a halo. "Religion," he blurted. "To whom? Why?"

Mike said slowly, "The cold war is a thing of the past but the basic battle for men's minds goes on. Frankly, I'm not opposed to the Department of Dirty Tricks when it comes to conflict between ideologies. And both sides use them. Remember back in the Cold War days the story about that shipment of rice that was sent by America to one of the lesser oriental countries to relieve a famine? Each bag as it was unloaded was weighed by a native official while another native stenciled something on the bag. American embassy officials were standing by but because they had never bothered to learn the native language, they didn't realize that

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the native stenciling the bags was lettering on them *This Rice Is a Gift From Russia.*"

Jones laughed sourly. "I'd forgotten about that one. However, I agree with you. If we were too foolish to learn the native langauge, we deserved to be gypped. But what's the 'dirty trick' you're obviously building up to?"

"Well, dirty trick isn't the word exactly. But for half a century the Russkies haven't been exposed to religion in spite of the fact that the Slavs are traditionally one of the most religious races on earth. Remember *Holy Russia* of the Czar's day? Well, for the first few decades of the commies they fought religion tooth and nail, taught atheism in the schools, closed up the churches. Very well. The old generation slowly died off and the new one was without religion, and the next generation following. The government doesn't care now. It's no longer an issue that threatens the State."

Jones was disappointed. "I don't see any connection with our need to cut off the Russkie flux of tourists."

Mike ignored him. "We'll have to plan it carefully, very hush hush. We'll send our boys into the country spreading religion, the Russkies will be inordinately receptive."

"Why will they?" Jones scowled.

Mike waggled a finger at him. 'Peoples are prone to new religions at two periods. First, in the beginning when luxuries are almost unknown, life hard and the simple virtues a necessity. Look at the Americans when we were settling the West. Strait-laced, hard working, church going, tight mouthed —let's face it, bigoted. The second period when a people are particularly prone to religion is during their decadence. Through pure boredom they seek out new experiences, new ways of achieving excitement. Rome is an example— in their final centuries the old strait-laced religion disappeared and a score of exotic new ones swept in from Egypt and the Orient."

Jones just didn't get it. "But what's the point? What kind of a new religion? What will they teach?"

"The Old Time Religion, of course. The virtues of the simple life. The glories of the home. Puritanism. Once it got under way we'd lay heavy stress against ostentatious display of wealth such as is involved in foreign travel. Stay at home and cultivate the simple virtues, that's the pitch."

Jones was shaking his head. "It wouldn't work. It might for awhile, as a fad, they're great for fads, but then something else would come along. Some other fad."

Mike pressed his point. "That's all we need. A couple of years. Stop the tourist trade for only two or three years and the Russkies

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would stop dumping their products on the world market. They wouldn't need the foreign exchange. That would revive commerce between the Western countries. A new boom would start. Once under way, boom begets boom. By the time the Russkies had become interested in tourism again, we'd be under full sail." Mike shrugged. "What'll happen then, I don't know. We can face that problem when it arrives."

Jones was shaking his head again. "The NATO council would never accept it. You can't toy with something as vital as religion."

"Don't be ridiculous, I'm not suggesting we teach them voodooism. This isn't the first time plain, ordinary religion has been used as an economic lever. And how can the Russkies lose? When it's all over, it will only mean that religion has been reintroduced into the Soviet Complex. Those Russians that like it will adopt it permanently, those that don't, won't. Once the movement starts, undoubtedly other religions will be reestablished, Judaism, Mohammedism, the various branches of Christianity."

Jones slapped the table with the palm of his hand. "It's worth bringing before the NATO council at least."

Mike said, "Yeah. And if they accept it and it works, I'll be looking for another job. Come to think of it, possibly as an evangelist in Moscow. Besides spreading the gospel to our friends, the benighted Russkies, I have some personal business to attend to there."

He looked at his watch. "I've got to get going now. Tomorrow, one of my groups terminates its vacation and returns north. We hold a masquerade for them at La Manana tonight. I've got to get into my matador costume."

Actually, it was Catherina's last evening and he couldn't allow himself to miss it. Especially since the rumor was that she was to appear in the costume of a Cretean Goddess of the Minoan period.

Originally, Mike Edwards had figured on a minor role for himself in the evangelistic attack on the Soviet Complex. Preferably as a missionary in the Moscow area. But it didn't work out that way. The more acceptance his basic plan received, the higher he was bumped in Western councils.

Actually, he'd been dismayed to find the extent to which they needed him. Too many government heads still operated with the old Good - Guys - Versus-the-Bad-Guys mentality. They had too little knowledge of the workings of their own politico-economic system and negative knowledge of the Soviet Complex. It was all black and white, to them.

"Look," he remembered saying to a group of top leaders, "for half a century we've been in a Second

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Industrial Revolution. Man's age old problem has finally been solved —the production of sufficient food, clothing, shelter, medical and education for *everyone*. Different groups accomplished it by somewhat different methods, but at this stage, it's been achieved by just about all."

One of the generals had huffed, "But with that prime ingredient, *freedom* in the West."

Mike had nodded. "Correct, but let's not read into that term more than is there. It means various things and sometimes one man's definition isn't another's. Remember when we were using it most freely at the height of the Cold War? The so-called 'free world' included Saudi-Arabia, Spain, Portugal, Formosa and South Korea. Evidently a country was 'free' simply if it was on our side, rather than the Russkies'. Actually freedom is never complete. Every society places restrictions on the freedom of its people. The moment there is more than one person in a society, there are restrictions on each individual's freedom. But that's not the important point. The thing is that even in those Cold War days everything was in a condition of flux. Scientific discoveries, breakthroughs in medicine, population explosion, fantastic industrial boom. And, above all, changes in society. The governments of every major nation on earth were in a state of change."

The Secretary of States cleared his throat at that, and Mike turned on him.

"Who would contend that the administrations following Eisenhower were the same type of government as the administration of, say, Hoover? True enough we retained the outer symbols of classical capitalist democracy, but the inner changes taking place were fantastic."

The Prime Minister said, "Admittedly, Her Majesty's government has seen many changes in the past half century. What we call a Conservative today would have been considered a flame snorting left-wing Laborite. The so-called Welfare State has developed beyond the point ever dreamed of by the old Fabian Socialists. But, I must say, the changes taking place on the Soviet side are as shaking."

"That's the point," Mike said. "The Russia of Stalin had little resemblance to that of Lenin. But, then, the Russia of Khrushchev evolved even more. Nikita was hard put to run fast enough, with those chubby little legs of his, to keep out in front of his rapidly changing politico-economic system, his developing New Class. And after Khrushchev's death? Well, the Old Bolshevik, complete with bomb in one hand and a copy of the *Communist Manifesto* in his hip pocket, just had no place in the new Soviet Complex; he was as extinct as the economic Robber

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Baron of the American Nineteenth Century."

"What are you getting at?" one of the generals had growled.

Mike laid it on the line. "If we're going to survive in this continuing battle for men's minds, we've got to recognize the changes that have taken place and are taking place. Recognize them and adapt to them. If we can do this better than the Russkies, then we'll have a considerable advantage. As it is now, they're as befuddled about us as we are about them."

At the end they had wound up giving him carte blanche for all practical purposes. The resources of the West were thrown into the campaign to halt the tide of Russkie tourism, that tide which was, indirectly, drowning the all necessary commerce of the Western world.

The necessary security measures had presented their difficulties, but all problems had been met.

The finding of teachers for the gigantic new seminary established in Far Cry, Kansas.

The selection of student-missionaries, most of whom were gleaned from the ranks of unemployed film and TV personnel, ad men and sales executives.

The writing of pamphlets, books, brochures, and throwaway leaflets dealing with the Old Time Church was turned over to the WPA Writer's Project.

An advertising firm formerly specializing in TV commercials was given the job of hymns. Some genius suggested that old Russian folk song tunes be used for the music, and the idea was carried out.

At Mike's suggestion, secret orders went to the style centers of Paris, Rome, London, New York and Los Angeles. The new stress on both men and women's fashions was conservatism, if not puritanism. The Russkies notoriously copied Western fashions. This might be the first step in quieting them down, curbing their enthusiasms, developing a taste for the simple life, the virtue of the family, the pleasure of STAYING AT HOME!

When he finally arrived there, a full year after his crash plan had first begun, Moscow offered few surprises to Mike Edwards. He'd already known that the mushrooming Russkie capital had surpassed even Tokyo in population. Books, TV and films had prepared him for the ultra-cleanliness of the streets, the beauty of the Kremlin and the squares and parks about it, the booming night clubs and good-time centers.

He was met at the Vnukovo airport by three of his missionaries and by several embassy officials all of whom had been instructed by their superiors to give his arrival a big play. After all, he was Michael J. Edwards, Bishop of the Old Time Church and titular head of

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all missions abroad, including those in the Soviet Complex.

Even as he came down the ramp from the rocketplane, he noted with satisfaction that the air-cushion cars belonging to the Western consular officials were in the new styles from Detroit. Black in color, ultra-austere in lines. The campaign was moving at a satisfying clip.

A young man in black was first to pump his hand enthusiastically. "Bishop Edwards," he gushed, "you have no idea what a pleasure it is to greet you. You'll be gratified to find what progress we've already made."

He stopped suddenly and blinked at Mike.

"What's the matter?" Mike scowled at him.

"Why," the other said hesitantly, "if I didn't know better, I would have sworn I smelled, ah, the demon rum on your breath."

Mike looked at him. Sometimes he wondered if it was a good idea, keeping the lower echelons in complete ignorance of their real role.

He said dryly, "The stewardess gave me something for airsickness. I have little knowledge about such medication, Brother."

"Of course," the other said. "How stupid of me."

Mike decided then and there that he was going to have to see as few as possible of his subordinates on this level.

He was quartered in the New Metropole on Sverdlov Square only two or three blocks from the Kremlin. Even Mike Edwards who had spent the better part of the last year bringing himself up to date on Russkie progress was amazed by the extent to which they'd been able to automate a hotel.

Particularly intriguing was the automatic bar at which you could dial any item in a rather impressive wine list. He was just beginning to get the real hang of it when the bell tinkled and the polaroid window, set in the door, revealed the dour face of Frank Jones.

Mike let him in and they sized each other up. Both wore the austere black clothing of a minister of the Old Time Church.

Mike said, "Well, at least I can say you look more authentic than I do."

"Like hell," Jones growled. "You were born to be a bishop. Where's the bar?"

Mike raised his eyebrows and pointed to his ear. Jones stared at him for a moment, then caught on. "Oh," he said. "No. No microphones, no secret police under the bed, nothing like that. The Russkies couldn't care less what we do —just so long as we don't sound off against the government or Andrei Zorin, or any of the other top bureaucrats."

"That's what I thought," Mike said. "It's a bad sign for the West. The Russkies don't bother to have secrets anymore." He led Jones

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back into the living room. "What would you like? I could get to be an alcoholic playing with this gadget. We ought to introduce them in the States."

"Pivo," Jones said. "What, and throw all the bartenders in the country out of work?"

"What's a pivo?" Mike said.

"Beer. Russian beer is so thick you can pick it out of your teeth, but it's better than Spanish beer."

"Anything not thick enough to eat is better to drink than Spanish beer," Mike said, dialing himself a chilled Stolitschnaja vodka. "How're things going?"

"Mostly we've been waiting for you to arrive. However, the country's ripe for it. Rotten ripe."

Mike looked at him, interested. "How do you know, Frank?"

The NATO man took a pull at his beer and scowled. "Well, for one thing . . . listen, do you know a character named Galushko? Nicholas Galushko?"

"Nick? Sure. He was one of my tourists in Torremolinos. He was about average. Drank too much."

"Well, he doesn't any more. He's just been making a tour through the Ukraine. Converted several thousand collective farm people already."

Mike stared at him. "Converted them to what?"

"Some kind of a new religion all his own. Teaches moderation. Once we get going, I think we can swing them into our group."

"Holy smokes," Mike said, awed. "I gave him the idea one night on a tapa tour through Malaga."

The NATO man finished off his beer and came to his feet. "We better get going, Mike. I've arranged for a meeting with the Minister of Culture, Alex Mikhailov."

"What for?" Mike said.

"I'll tell you on the way down," Jones said. "We've got to get TV time, and maybe get on the newscasts. Possibly we can talk them into doing a movie of the Old Time Church."

Mike let himself be ushered to the door. "You're getting *too* optimistic, aren't you? Why should they do a movie about us, or allow us TV time, for that matter?"

Jones explained on the way down in the elevator. "You've got some surprises coming. You know how lousy the TV programs are back in the States? Well, they've got the same problem here. They've gone through every bag of tricks of every producer and have scrapped the bottom of the barrel so far as every idea of every writer is concerned."

They were in the street now, and Frank Jones pressed a button set next to the New Metropole's main entrance. In a moment, an air cushion taxi disengaged itself from the traffic flow and pulled up to the curb before them.

Mike Edwards had to force himself to climb in. He was far from happy about driverless cabs.

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Jones dialed the address coordinates and went on with his point. "They're on an automation kick. Twenty years ago they put a million youngsters into their universities to study time and motion engineering and become automation technicians. Now they're reaping the harvest. And every time some new discovery comes along that would ordinarily toss a couple of hundred thousand people into the ranks of the unemployed, they just lower the work week for everybody in that industry. It's down to an average of ten hours now."

"What's this got to do with TV programs?" Mike said.

Jones shrugged glumly. "In the States we've got twenty million unemployed living high on the hog on unemployment insurance and spending their time glued to the TV set. Over here they're all supposedly employed but everybody works only ten hours a week, thirty weeks a year. The rest of the time they're looking for entertainment and the Minister of Culture in the Soviet Complex gets just as big an ulcer trying to provide his country with new TV ideas as a Madison Avenue tycoon does in our country."

Frank Jones hesitated a moment before saying, "You know, something's been building up in me ever since I got this assignment."

"Oh?" Mike said. "What?"

"I'm not so sure there's as many differences between the West and the Soviet Complex as we usually think."

The Palace of Rest and Culture was one of the biggest eyesores in Moscow. Located on Kalugo Boulevard and immediately across from Niezkuchny Park, it dominated the skyline of this section of Moscow.

At Dobryninskaya Square Mike Edwards and Frank Jones had turned west to Gorki Park which they paralleled on Kaluga until the Palace of Rest and Culture loomed before them.

Mike had been looking out the window of the cab at the maze of taxis and limousines that charged at headlong speed through the streets. There was something shaking to see three boisterous Russkies, often bottles in hand, carousing in the back seat of a car that had no driver. You momentarily expected disaster.

He winced as their cab seemed all but ready to crash into a brilliantly hued driverless limousine. "Don't *any* cabs have drivers in this God forsaken town?" he complained to Jones.

"That's more of the labor saving bit," Jones said sourly. "They automated the streets so as to eliminate all the manpower formerly involved in driving the cars, and then they pulled the conductors off buses and stopped selling tickets for the subways. Made all transportation free. It was wasted labor, they said, collecting fares. They've

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got a bug on this wasted labor thing."

They pulled up before the skyscraper which was the entertainment center of the country and climbed from the cab. Mike slammed the door after him and the cab whizzed off into the traffic.

"Where does it all finally wind up?" he muttered, staring after the vehicle.

"Where does what wind up?" Jones said.

"This automation. Finally they'll get it down to where no work at all is necessary. Then what happens?"

Jones grunted. "The same thing's happening in the West. Weren't you automated out of your professorship?"

"Sometimes I get the feeling," Mike said, "that the human race has opened up Pandora's Box, that we've built ourselves a monster like Frankenstein never dreamed of, that we've got a Saber-Tooth tiger by the tail, that we've dropped the reins and the horse is running away with us."

"All at once?" Jones said.

"All at once," Mike muttered.

In the brutally large reception hall of the Palace of Rest and Culture, they spoke their piece into the screen of a telephone and waited for instructions.

A voice behind them said, "Why, it's Mike."

They turned.

She was still unforgettably fair of skin, blue of eyes, blonde of hair, as only a northern Slav can be.

Mike said, "Catherina!"

Automatically, his eyes dropped from her face to check, but she was wearing by current Russkie standards, a comparatively conservative suit.

Jones cleared his throat warningly.

Mike beamed at her. "What in the world are you doing here?" he said, before she could ask him the same.

"I work here, Mike. I told you once, I think. I'm a production secretary for Bolshi-Films. But you . . . ?"

Jones was obtaining directions from the automatic receptionist. Now he cleared his throat again, and said, "Ah, we'll have to hurry."

Mike said, "Look, Catherina, could I see you later? Possibly tonight?"

"When? Where?" she said, smiling her Catherina smile at him. His stomach rolled over twice, happily.

"I don't know any places. I just arrived."

"At the cocktail bar of the Hotel Tsentralnaya, at eight."

On the way up to the offices of Alex Mikhailov, Jones looked at him. "Who's that? I seem to have seen her somewhere before."

"In Torremolinos. One of the tourists," Mike said dreamily.

"And you've made a date to meet her in a bar?"

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"Um-m-m. Why not?"

"Remember?" Frank Jones said accusingly. "You're a bishop of the Old Time Church. You don't drink. You don't smoke. You don't dance. You don't go out with flighty looking blondes. Above all, you don't hang out in the most popular bar in Moscow."

"Holy smokes," Mike said. "I forgot."

"Yeah, Jones said dryly.

Mike said, "Well, Catherina Saratov is in a position to wonder how it is that a tourist guide in Southern Spain is suddenly a bishop. He let his voice go thoughtful. "I suppose I'll have to spend some time with her covering up."

"Yeah," Jones said. "And obviously that's going to be a terrible chore so far as you're concerned."

The interview with the Minister of Culture had been a howling success. In fact, he'd practically fallen into their arms.

After a rundown on just what it was that their Old Time Church advocated, and assurances that they had nothing whatsoever to say against the Soviet State and no opinions whatsoever about Russkie bureaucrats from Andrei Zorin right on down, he'd practically turned over the resources of the Ministry of Rest and Culture to them.

"Why, do you realize," he said happily, "the nearest thing to a really new attraction we've had for six months is a dancing Panda? This calls for a celebration!" He banged happily on a bell. "Religion!" he chortled. "Everybody'll be overwhelmed. Something absolutely new!"

An underling entered from another office.

"Champagne!" Mikhailov roared. "Send in some of the girls from the distribution office. Dial us some food. Caviar, smoked salmon, sturgeon, Stolichny salad, Soodak fish, everything! And lots of champagne, Kirill, we're celebrating. Have the best sent in!"

Kirill was impressed. Before Mike could open his mouth, he had disappeared again.

Mike said, "But, Your Excellency, we just finished telling you. The Old Time Church teaches moderation."

"Yes, indeed," Jones said piously.

"Moderation?" Alex Mikhailov said. "But a celebration is in order. Why, you'll be the hit of the season. I'll be awarded the Hero Medal for outstanding Socialist Labor. What do you mean, moderation?"

"Moderation in all things," Mike said gently. "Ostentatious display, ostentatious use of luxuries, spending one's time in such frivolities as foreign travel, are the curse of the spiritual side of the race."

"They are?" Mikhailov said blankly. "Why?"

For the next hour they told him

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why, fascinating him to the point that when Kirill, his secretary, returned smiling widely and heading a procession of would be revelers, he was snarled out of the office, champagne, girls, caviar and all.

It wound up eventually with Mikhailov promising to attend their initial meeting which was to be held in St. Basil's, the candy cane cathedral on Red Square. It was the first time the building had been used other than as a museum for generations.

The cocktail bar of the Tsentralnaya was currently the most popular place in town and when Mike Edwards first entered the shock wave of sound, generated by Russkies en masse in their cups, all but staggered him back through the door again. In Spain, at least, he'd got his Russians in no larger numbers than a couple of hundred at a time. This so-called cocktail bar must have held at least twice that, and all of them seemingly stoned, Russkie style.

He had to circle the room twice before spotting Catherina Saratov. As he made his way to her table, he tried to think what it was that was so different about her in Moscow as compared to Spain. Finally it came to him. Catherina was absolutely conservative, compared to the others in the room.

He sat down across from her wordlessly, let his eyes take her in with complete enjoyment. The fact that she was doing the same, was obviously as pleased with his presence as he was with hers, didn't lessen the enjoyment.

Somehow they had no need to speak. They knew that this was it and that something wonderful would come of it all. Something very wonderful.

Mike opened his mouth at last but the blast of sound which surrounded them all but drowned out his words.

He shouted to her, "Why did you suggest we meet here?"

She shouted back. "I wanted you to see it."

"Why?" he shouted.

She stood, put a hand on his arm and led him toward the entry.

In the lobby, Mike shook his head for clarity. "Holy smokes," he said. "I used to think all bars were essentially the same. Evidently Moscow has exceptions to offer. Can't we go somewhere and talk?"

"Of course. Do you like Georgian cuisine? The Aragvi restaurant, over on Gorki Street, is comparatively quiet."

"Anything is comparatively quiet to that place in there."

She chuckled. "We Russians have several generations of—what is your term?—*living-it-up* to catch up with."

Mike said, "In spite of the success of your speed-up projects in other fields, I wonder about this one."

Catherina laughed. "We shall

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have to make a Seven Year Plan."

Mike gestured at the bar they'd just left. "They seem to want to accomplish it in seven weeks. Why did you say you wanted me to see that place?"

"I'll tell you when we get to the Aragvi."

The Aragvi was located at 6 Gorki Street, only a few steps off Revolutsia Place. It turned out to be one of the older top restaurants in the Russkie capital. Mike and Catherina got as far away from the orchestra as possible and Mike dialed a bottle of Georgian Teliani.

However, when the bottle came, Catherina shook her head as he began to pour. "I'm not drinking these days. It ties in with my reason for wanting you to see that terrible bar—just as an example. Actually, I haven't forgotten what you said in Malaga. Mike, what is happening to my people?"

He twirled his glass in his fingers. They had arrived at the point where it looked as though he was going to have to go into his act. He hated the idea. This was Catherina. He didn't want anything of falseness between them.

Mike said slowly, "You touched on it earlier when you were joking about catching up on your living-it-up. With that series of five year and seven year plans you people went through for so long, you accumulated a head of steam. Now you're blowing it." He didn't add, *and in so doing fouling the economies of the rest of the world.*

Catherina said, "Until a year ago, I was part of it. Nothing seemed to make much difference except having a good time. Now, Mike, I'm afraid. Look at us. No ambition except to attend another party, to over drink, over play, to go to bed with whoever's available. Twenty years or so ago we had our *mitrofanushka,* our *stilyagi,* the so called jet-set, among our young people. What is it in America?"

"Juvenile delinquents."

"Practically everybody was contemptuous of them. We expected our youth to study, to work hard, to help build our country as strong as any."

"And so you did," Mike said, keeping the sour quality from his voice.

"Yes, and now what? Pride in study or work is a thing of the past. *Everybody* has become *stilyagi.* Even our adults are delinquent."

Mike said uncomfortably, "What are you building up to Catherina?"

She leaned across the table and touched his hand. "Mike, what you were telling us about moderation and the need to devote yourself to higher things than dulling your God-given senses with alcohol and over indulgence. Mike, our people have to be given this message."

Mike sat back in his chair and blinked at her. For the first time it occurred to him that far from pulling a gimmick out of the Bag

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of Dirty Tricks for the benefit of the West, he was sponsoring a program that ultimately was more needed by the Russkies than by his own side.

She twisted her mouth ruefully. "But then, I don't suppose you wanted to see me this evening to have laid on your lap the problems of Russia. Let's talk about us, Mike.

He moistened suddenly dry lips. "Yes," he said. "Let's talk about us."

From the first it went with shocking success. For every flow of tide there is ebb and the hedonistic tidal wave that had engulfed the Russkies was at its crest when Mike Edwards' missionaries struck.

Overnight, the reversal to conservatism in dress, in cars, in entertainment took place.

In lectures, in revivals, in church meetings, on TV, the message was spread. Bolshi-films did a score of quickie movies. A hundred theatrical groups produced plays. Clubs were formed, organizations sprang up. All to promote the new belief. Moderation was the new Russkie fad. Nowhere can a fad spread so rapidly as through a people with time on their hands—and in all history there had never been a people with so much time on hand as the automation-freed Russkies.

It was some six months later, two o'clock in the morning, and Mike Edwards was comfortably deep in sleep in his suite at the New Metropole when the banging came at the door.

Mike rolled over, tried to ignore it, clung desperately to his dream of married life with Catherina. Finally he swung his feet over the bed's side, growling, "There's a bell, damn it. Don't break the door down."

There were two of them and they pushed by him and into the living room of his suite. They were six-footers, two-hundred-pounders, empty of expression, inconspicuous of clothing. Yes, and flat of feet.

Actually, since the Aeroflot rocketplane had landed him at Vnukovo airport, Mike had been expecting them, sooner or later.

However, he began, "What is the meaning of . . ."

One of them said, "Get dressed."

Mike said, "I want to call the American Embassy."

They grunted amusement in unison as though they'd been rehearsed.

They followed him into the bedroom, watched dispassionately as he dressed.

Mike said, "I demand to be allowed to phone the American Ambassador."

"No phone calls," one said.

There was nobody in the halls of the New Metropole at this time of night. They descended by elevator, hustled through the lobby and into a large black limousine, for once one with a chauffeur.

One of his bulky escorts sat to

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the right of Mike Edwards, the other to the left. They said nothing, in full character.

At this point, Mike told himself sourly, I should have a little glass capsule of cyanide hidden in my mouth. Wasn't that the way they did it in the old days? Mike had few illusions about the ability of the Russkies to break him down under pressure.

And just when the effects of the campaign had been showing results.

They by-passed Red Square and skirted the Alexandrovski Sad park along the west side of the Kremlin. They entered at the Borovitskij Gate, went up the cobblestoned incline there without loss of pace and drew up before the Bolshoi Kremlevski Dvorets, the Great Kremlin Palace.

Two sentries snapped to attention as they entered. Evidently, Mike's guards needed no passes. A sixteen step ornate staircase led them up from the ground floor to a gigantic vestibule the vault of which was supported by four monolithic granite columns. They turned left and entered an anteroom. More guards who snapped to attention.

One of Mike's escorts approached a heavy door and knocked discreetly. Someone came, opened it slightly, evidently said something to someone else back in the room, and then opened it widely enough for Mike and his escorts.

The chamber had obviously once been a Czarist reception room. Now it was a not overly large office. Mike stood a dozen feet from the door and looked at the man behind the desk, who, in turn, looked at him.

There was no doubt about who it was. Andrei Zorin, the fourth generation dictator of the Soviet Complex. The heir of Lenin, Stalin and Khrushchev. Number One. Chairman of the Presidium of the Central Committee.

Zorin was a man of fifty, heavy-set, frowzy, a weary disillusionment about his tired eyes. His character, so far as the outside world knew, was largely a mystery. A reversal from the exhibitionism of the exuberant Khrushchev, in more than twenty years of authority he'd never granted an interview to western journalists, a fact that hadn't endeared him.

Number One leaned back in his chair. He said in Russian, "Frol, Kliment, you may leave." The two guards turned and left the room.

There was only one other left now with Mike and Zorin, a younger man, as thin and nervous as Zorin was heavy and stolid.

Zorin said, "This is Nuritdin Kirichenko, Minister of Internal Security."

In other words, Mike told himself emptily, head of the secret police.

Zorin said, "Sit down, Mr. Edwards."

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Mike shrugged and took a heavy leather chair. He might as well enjoy what relaxation he could at this point. He had no illusions about the future.

Zorin said, "I understand your Russian is fluent so if you have no objections we'll speak my language."

"None at all," Mike said. He had a mouse being played with feeling, although Zorin was more a moth-eaten bear than a cat.

Zorin read from a report before him. "Michael J. Edwards, Academician degree in political economy in your early twenties." He looked up at Mike. "Congratulations. Quite an accomplishment, so I understand."

"Thanks," Mike said.

Zorin went back to his report. "Spent some years teaching political economy."

Mike said nothing.

Zorin said, "Resigned from university and took position as tourist agent in Spain. Eventually began an association with a Mr. Frank Jones, notoriously an, ah, hatchet-man, I believe the western term is, for the anti-Soviet organization NATO. Returned to America for a series of secretive meetings with top Western officials. Emerged in approximately a year as a high official of the . . ." Zorin looked at his paper again ". . . the Old Time Church. A religious organization of which we can find no previous record. Six months ago arrived in Moscow and with a large staff began a strenuous and highly expensive program to spread this new faith."

Zorin leaned back in his chair and looked at Mike.

Mike Edwards said nothing. He had passed that point of despair where anything made any difference. He only wished that they'd had as little as one more month to work. By then, nothing would have stopped them.

Zorin said, "Frankly, from the first we couldn't understand what in the world you had in mind."

Mike said, "From the first!"

Kirichenko, who up until this time hadn't opened his mouth, doing nothing more than remaining on his chair and jittering nervously, said, "Did you think us fools?"

That was a good question, Mike decided.

Zorin quieted his colleague with a tired sweep of his hand. He said, "We were, frankly, intrigued. We must thank you for an interesting puzzle to solve."

Mike reached hopefully for a straw. "There is no puzzle. My organization is simply evangelizing its faith."

"Of course," Zorin said, not even bothering to use a sarcastic note. He picked up another paper. "We saw light as Soviet exports fell off and, unsurprisingly, those of the United States, the Common Market and England all began to grow."

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Mike forgot about the straw. They had him all right. He supposed that Frank Jones and the others were even now being corralled. He wondered how stringent the measures taken against the Russkies who had joined up would be. He felt a twinge of fear for Catherina. Catherina! They had planned to be married in a few weeks.

Zorin tossed the paper back to his desk. He looked Mike over again.

He said, "You did an excellent job, Mr. Edwards. It is my despair that we of the Soviet Complex have so few young men, any more, who care about doing an excellent job."

Mike shrugged. He wondered momentarily if it'd be worth the try to jump the desk and slug the other. Would the pure pleasure of getting in just one or two blows be worth the extra working over they'd probably give him?

Zorin said interestedly, "Do you think it will work?"

Mike brought his attention back to reality. "Do I think what will work?"

"Your idea of teaching moderation with the long distance view of minimizing Soviet tourism and eventually reviving Western trade as our own falls off?"

Mike snorted in self deprecation. Why kid around any longer? They knew the whole story. "I originally hoped it would. Now, obviously, you've caught on."

"That's not what I asked you," Zorin said, only slightly impatient. "Do you think it will work?"

Mike stared at him.

Zorin spelled it out. "Thus far, Mr. Edwards, we have taken no steps to prevent your organization from continuing its efforts." He looked over at his Minister of Internal Security. "In fact, Mr. Kirichenko, here, is in favor of my joining the Old Time Church to set an example."

It took several moments for that to be assimilated. Mike said finally, "Look, have you got a drink around here?"

Zorin chuckled as he brought a bottle from the desk. "My dear Bishop Edwards, remember? Moderation." He brought out three shot glasses, poured the yellowish liquid into them. "Moskovskaya Starka vodka," he said. "The best, flavored with forest herbs."

Mike knocked the drink, stiff-wristed, back over his palate.

The two Russkies joined him, solemnly. Zorin poured three more. "This should be served cold," he said.

Mike said, "Look. Could we start somewhere nearer to the beginning?"

Number One scowled at him. "Frankly, I'm not sure where the beginning is. Maybe with Lenin. Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov's main task was to bring the Bolsheviks to power. He succeeded. Stalin's main task was to pacify the country un-

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der party rule and to lay the foundations for industrialization. He succeeded. Khrushchev's task was to overtake the West in production and bring abundance to the Soviet Complex. He succeeded." Zorin paused.

Mike said, "And what's your task?"

Zorin looked at him, an expression of frustration on his heavy face. "I'm not sure I know," he said. He twisted his mouth wryly. "You are a student of political economy, Mr. Edwards. What would you say?"

Mike was gaining courage by the minute. He said, "Well, according to your boy Marx, once the revolution was successful, the State was going to wither away. Instead, ever since Lenin's time, you've been strengthening it."

Zorin said, interestedly, "Did it ever occur to you, Mr. Edwards, that handing over power isn't the simplest thing in the world? We of the Central Committee admittedly govern the Soviet State today. To whom would we hand over our power?"

Mike was momentarily stopped. "Well," he said, "to the people. Let them democratically elect their own officials."

Number One was scowling again. "Revolutions don't come from the top down, Mr. Edwards. They come from the bottom up. And they have in the past through the efforts of a frustrated majority, often a starving one, been pushed by economic necessity to overthrow their ruling class. Where is the starving majority in the Soviet Complex today? A few decades ago the Yugoslavian Djilas railed against the New Class that was growing in the Soviet countries. But as time passed more and more of our people graduated into that class. Now they're all members."

Mike said, frowning, "You mean you wish you could step down, and can't?"

Kirichenko said nervously, "When men in power let go the reins, things have a way of getting out of hand. None of us looks forward to the possibility of some hotheads lining us up against the nearest wall, or hanging us by the heels from a handy lamppost."

Zorin said unhappily, "Actually, there is no one to hand our power. No one is interested in taking it. No one could care less." He sighed deeply. "I come back to my earlier question, Mr. Edwards. Do you think it will work?"

"You mean the new religion?" Mike couldn't quite get the others' lack of antagonism. "Well, so far it has, and it's growing fast."

Zorin ran his hand over his face. "Maybe it's the answer. I don't know.

"Answer to what?" Mike said, all but snappishly. He'd come a long way since entering this office twenty minutes ago.

Zorin was staring at him. "May-

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be you of the West can help," he muttered. "Perhaps it's our only chance. Perhaps we can enlarge upon your idea. Bring a new spark of life to . . ." He let his sentence fade off unhappily.

Kirichenko came to his feet, reached over and poured the three of them still another drink. The bottle was getting low. He said, "Let's get down to the essentials. If we're going to discuss this with a representative of the West, we might as well put all our cards on the table." He added sourly, "They aren't very high cards."

This just didn't make sense. Mike Edwards had come to Moscow with the feeling that the West was up against the wall and his job was to make a feeble attempt to escape the situation the Soviet Complex had them in. But the way these two were talking, you'd think the positions were reversed.

Zorin said, "To sum it up, Mr. Edwards, you of the United States and the rest of the Western countries have been stymied in your economies."

Mike rasped, "Because of forty million Russian tourists spilling over your borders each year, and with every chance of the number growing."

"Forty million," Kirichenko grunted bitterly. "Nothing!"

"Nothing?" Mike said indignantly.

The Soviet Complex's number one bureaucrat sighed. "Mr. Edwards," he said, "have you noticed the rather large number of Chinese about Moscow?"

"You mean the students, the trade delegations, the cultural exchange artists?"

"Ha," Kirichenko said bitterly, reaching for his drink.

"I mean the tourists," Zorin said. "They're just beginning." He ran his hand down over his face wearily. "There were fifty million of them this year. Chinese—finally successful in their Great Leaps Forward—keen to begin seeing the world. And where do they most wish to go ? To Russia! The fatherland of communism. Every good communist in China wants to see Moscow, Leningrad, Stalingrad, the Crimea! Their aircraft factories are working under forced draft to provide air liners for the traffic. It is estimated that the number will be one hundred million next year, two hundred the year following. Mr. Edwards, do you realize that the present population of China exceeds a billion?"

Mike was taken aback.

He said slowly, "You mean that you too would like to figure out some way of keeping the tourists out of your country? But . . ." he thought about it ". . . you haven't the same problem we have. You don't need foreign trade. Why not just let them come?"

Zorin spelled it out for him, his face desperate. "Mr. Edwards, the Chinese have had one famed at-

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tribute down through history. Their ability to swallow up the invader. China would be overrun and conquered by an enemy. A few decades later the enemy would have interbred with the hundreds of millions of Chinese; a century later there would be no signs of the enemy left."

Mike said, "What's this got to do with tourism?"

"Isn't it obvious? Here, have another drink. Kirichenko, get out another bottle. Mr. Edwards, as you've undoubtedly noted, Russian mores have loosened considerably in the past generation. In the early days of Bolshevik power we were actually quite puritanical, absolutely Victorian in our sexual code. But, as you've undoubtedly seen, as our people become more hedonistic, the moral code slips."

Mike was gaping at him, comprehension beginning to seep through.

"Two or three hundred million Chinese," Zorin shuddered, "crossing our borders on pleasure bent, each year. Estimate, Mr. Edwards. With our present loose sexual code how long do you think it would be before there wasn't a full blooded Russian left in the country?" His voice dropped to an anguished whisper. "How long before there weren't any Russians left at all?" Zorin said.

Kirichenko was pouring another round from a new bottle, his hand shaking.

Mike said, "Holy smokes, and then when they'd all seen Russia thoroughly, they'd start in seeing the rest of the world."

"Exactly," Zorin said emphatically. He came to his feet, weaving only a trifle.

"Mr. Edwards," he said incisively, "to use an old Americanism, let's face it. The cold war is over between us. Not in an Armageddon, not in a Gotterdammerung of guided missiles and H-Bombs, but in the face of a problem common to both."

Mike and Kirichenko came to their own feet, their faces set firmly, their glasses upraised.

Mike bit out courageously, slurring only slightly, "The common enemy of all," he toasted. "Tourists! They must and shall be stopped!"

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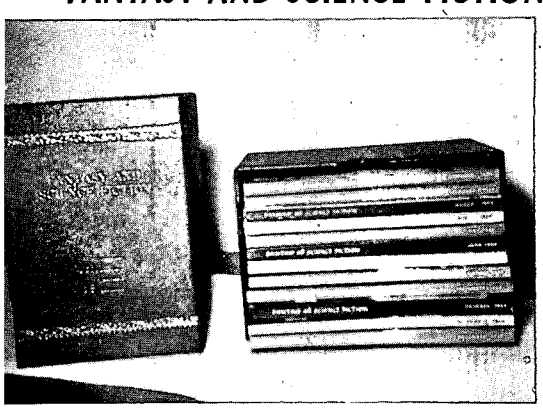

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